

## The New American Medicine

Mankind is in the midst of a biological revolution, a process of change that is affecting the very roots of human existence. The biological revolution of mankind, in which human beings are re-connecting with Nature inside and outside of themselves, is bringing about a gradual restructuring of human beings and a reshaping of human society.

Although no aspect of our lives—personal or social—has remained untouched by the transformative events of the past 100 years, you will not hear about this biological revolution on television or radio. Nor will you read about it in popular books and magazine articles. Yet religion, science, education, medicine, philosophy and psychology are vastly different today than a century ago. Family life, the institution of marriage, birthing and child-rearing practices, school and the workplace—all have changed dramatically since 1900.

This change has not progressed smoothly. It has not proceeded in a forward direction alone; there have been great setbacks along the way. This radical change in human life has not been without suffering, confusion and error. However, the biological revolution of mankind is underway and it cannot be stopped.

The current interest in America in complementary medicine is part of this revolution, of a sea change that is dramatically altering who we are and how we live. The complementary health movement is like a single wave in this vast sea of change. For the past 25 years, in the United States at least, this wave has been moving from the horizon toward the shore. Over the decades, this approaching wave has become obvious to increasing numbers of people observing the sea change. Today, the wave is cresting and is about to sweep across the nation, transforming both how health care is delivered by professionals and how individuals care for their own health.

The diverse medical techniques previously referred to as “holistic” or “alternative” medicine are now variously called “complementary” or “integrative” medicine. In the medical profession, the acronym CAM (for Complementary-Alternative Medicine) has become increasingly popular to describe a wide range of modalities outside conventional medicine. To many in the medical profession and the general public, the field of complementary medicine seems like a maze. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a maze as “an intricate, usually confusing network of interconnecting pathways, as in a garden; a labyrinth...<sup>3</sup>. Something made up of many confused, conflicting elements; a tangle.”

At first glance, the public does seem to be faced by a confusing tangle of techniques and practitioners about which it is difficult to get reliable information. However, the term “maze” may not be the best one to describe the situation. The word “labyrinth” may be more useful. There is a common misconception that these two words are synonymous. Even the American Heritage Dictionary promotes this misconception in its definition of a labyrinth as “an intricate structure of interconnecting passages through which it is difficult

to find one's way; a maze..." In fact, the words maze and labyrinth are not synonymous at all. They have quite different meanings, yet both can be useful in coming to an understanding of the New American Medicine.

Mainstream medicine has become much like a maze, unfortunately. The rise and dominance of HMOs and other third-party payers has ended the era of the "personal physician" or "the family doctor." A patient may not know who he or she will see on the next office visit as insurers drop physicians from their plans and physicians opt out of burdensome contracts with managed care plans. The over-specialization of medicine has also contributed to the fragmentation of care, as has the mechanization of modern medicine. With its over-reliance on highly sophisticated medical technology, biomedicine has lost sight of the person. Patients are truly lost in a medical maze of bureaucratic paper work, mechanistic medical testing, and ever-changing, harried doctors; a maze in which patients too often have become symptoms and diseases, no longer living human beings.

The field of complementary medicine also presents both patients and physicians with another challenging maze. Ancient medical traditions and exotic modern disciplines appear to offer much in terms of prevention and treatment. However, although many claims are made for various complementary approaches to health care, there is often not a great deal of evidence to support the claims. Once again, people confronting this subject can feel trapped in a maze.

In the ancient myth, Icarus escaped from the maze by rising above it on the wings fashioned by his father, Daedalus. To understand complementary medicine, it is also necessary to rise above it and see the whole picture. The divergent approaches to health that comprise what we call complementary medicine are not analogous to the many specialties that exist in Western bioscientific medicine. Seen from a new perspective, it becomes clear that complementary care involves an entirely different view of health than Western medicine. It also becomes clear that each of the major complementary medical modalities is a path toward health or a way to wellness, rather than a technique to treat a disease or the symptoms of disease.

A labyrinth, far from being a confusing tangle, consists of only one path that leads to the center and back out again. Complementary medicine begins to look more like a labyrinth and less like a maze when one understands that this approach to health is really a way or a path. Just as one chooses to enter the labyrinth and follows the path, so, too, one chooses a complementary approach and follows it toward health.

The basic principle common to all complementary approaches is taking responsibility for one's own health. Just as there are many different designs for labyrinths, there are many paths to health. Each labyrinth offers the person who enters it a way to order chaos, according to the Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, President of Veriditas--The World-Wide Labyrinth Project. People can easily get lost when confronted with the maze of options presented by complementary care. But when an individual finds or experiences a complementary method that works for her or him, suddenly, the confusing maze become a well-designed labyrinth.

All of the major complementary approaches—such as Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese Medicine—lead each person, practitioner and patient alike, to the center of their being. At the center of the labyrinth of complementary care is the physical Life Energy, which has been called by many names over the millennia. The Life Energy is the healing force that is the foundation of all medical disciplines. Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, said “The natural force within each of us is the greatest healer of disease.” Western medicine has nearly forgotten this truth but, with the emerging integration of complementary and conventional care, this ancient insight is reasserting itself in modern medicine.

As separate, individual therapies, and as a whole approach to health, complementary care may lead to the core of our beings and to health—if the right practitioner is found and if the individual takes responsibility for his or her own health. With the New American Medicine, it is not a matter of taking St. John's Wort instead of taking Prozac. Neither is it a matter of going to a healer for a pat health program instead of a physician for a prescription. The New American Medicine involves a fundamental change in attitude about health.

Since the 1940s, Western drug-oriented and technological medicine has been in the ascendancy and has made significant contributions to the improvement of daily life for many millions of people. However, because of a complicated mix of power-political and financial factors, Western technological medicine has proven a mixed blessing overall. Because of actions taken by its proponents over the past few decades to secure its predominance, today's biomedicine has become an obstacle in the way to further advances in healing, to the detriment of all.

For example, drug makers have evolved from the small businesses that promoted patent medicines to the global pharmaceutical corporations that push powerful prescription and non-prescription drugs. The drug industry uses its wealth and power to thwart all other treatment approaches that threaten its economic base. This is logical in terms of capitalism. It is illogical and self-destructive in terms of human progress and health.

In addition, the manufacturers of medical devices have developed ingenious machines that have transformed the practice of medicine. However, the physicians who have been trained in mechanistic, drug-oriented medicine have been transformed themselves in ways that have caused them to lose touch—literally—with their patients' and their patients' needs. Because physicians rarely touch patients, they rarely touch their patients' lives.

At times, the power of the pharmaceutical and medical technologies industries--supported mainstream physicians and physician organizations, as well as by the politicians who also serve their interests--can seem as awesome as a tidal wave. Through their economic clout, these industries control the mass media images that shape public opinion as to who is a “real” doctor and what is “real” medicine. They also control the education of physicians through “philanthropic” grants to universities that endow chairs in this or that specialty. In addition, a majority of physicians receive their education about drugs from the pharmaceutical salespeople who call on them. Finally, these powerful corporate entities control what research will—and what research will not—be funded and carried out by the

institutions and individuals who are dependent on their financial largesse.

For 50 years, by setting the parameters of the discussion, powerful economic forces in the health business in America have been able to position themselves as the “experts” and all who disagree with them as “quacks” of one form or another. For example, for decades, those concerned with nutrition and health were categorized and mocked as “health food nuts.” Is a person who eats nutritious, natural, organic foods a “nut,” or is a person who eats foods adulterated with artificial additives and pesticides a “nut?”

There are many ways in which this example can be applied to the practice of medicine. Is a person with high cholesterol levels making a wiser choice by taking a potent cholesterol-lowering drug or by exercising and making needed dietary changes? Is a person with hypertension better off taking a powerful antihypertensive drug (many of which cause impotence in men) or by engaging in the practice of meditation-based stress reduction? Is high-tech surgery the answer for chronic low-back pain or the practice of yoga?

The proponents of Western technological, drug-oriented medicine will correctly claim that there is no scientific evidence (although there may be significant anecdotal evidence) for the usefulness of various complementary health practices. In large part, that is because there has been no money available to fund the type of scientific studies needed to persuade the advocates of Western biomedicine. Why? For the same reason the manufacturers of candles and oil lamps did not fund Edison's research into the electric light bulb.

However, the situation is changing rapidly. In fact, the era of the dominance drug-oriented, high-technology medicine is over. This approach to health will continue to hold sway for some time to come, but it has peaked and is now in decline. This is evident, for example, in the growing resistance of life-threatening microorganisms to synthetic drugs and in the move toward the “high touch” approach of complementary care by the general public and some physicians as well.

Quietly, over the past 25 years, a major development has been taking place—the development of complementary care as a viable approach to health. Like small tributaries that start unseen, save by a few local residents, in the woods in the mountains far from the big cities, the complementary medicine movement has grown in America. Today, these tributaries have joined to form streams across the nation. These streams cannot compete with the mighty rivers of mainstream biomedicine—yet. But increasing numbers of Americans are aware of their existence and are turning to complementary approaches to health for answers that drug-oriented high-tech biomedicine cannot supply.

Increasingly, proponents of mainstream American medicine are now trying to dam up some of the alternative streams and divert them and their practitioners into their own hospitals and managed care organizations. Some “real” doctors are forsaking their allopathic practices for alternative disciplines. Big names in biomedicine are suddenly becoming experts in complementary care.

Since the end of WWII, the tidal wave of Western medicine has swept across the globe. But

the end of “medicine as we know it” is at hand. This is not yet obvious in our media-saturated society, where citizens are inundated with health advertisements on TV and radio, in news papers and magazines, and even on mass transit systems, all extolling the superiority of drugs and technology. But the beginning of the return of healing is at hand.

Basic concepts of health and healing are being re-evaluated and transformed. Modern science and ancient wisdom are merging. In the United States, we are coming into contact with knowledge from other cultures that was previously unavailable or to which people in general were formerly not receptive. This can be seen in the metaphors that are being created to describe health care, replacing ones that have guided us for many years.

Metaphors help us to understand reality. They arise from, and help shape, our conceptions of health and healing. In recent years, the military metaphor has had a powerful impact on public and professional perceptions of health and healing in the United States. Medicine is seen as a battlefield on which we fight our wars against disability, death and disease. Physicians are in the trenches or on the front-line fighting invasive diseases, using their therapeutic armamentaria aggressively. There are many more examples to illustrate the military metaphor but these should suffice.

Recently, the marketplace metaphor has begun to change how we think about medicine in our country. Medicine is a business; physicians are entrepreneurs; and patients are consumers. Medical care is a product. Health care providers are motivated first and foremost by profit and the bottom line. Business ethics, not medical ethics, rule.

Both the military metaphor and the marketplace metaphor aptly describe the practice of biomedicine in the United States today. However, a new metaphor is being introduced into the culture, one with its origins in the East and elsewhere, one whose spirit is that of the complementary care movement—the ecology metaphor.

In Western culture, the sources of both health and disease appear to come from without. In general, people expect to be healed or to be cured by their doctors. In the West, we turn to others for relief from disease or to have health restored. In addition, in our culture, the body is viewed as a machine. When it has a broken part (e.g., a fractured wrist) or needs a new part (e.g., an organ transplant), the body is sent to the repair shop—the hospital. At the hospital, the mechanic (i.e., the physician) fixes the machine. This is the over-arching metaphor of mechanistic, reductionistic medicine.

In the ecology metaphor, the body is not a machine; it is a sacred temple. The hospital is not a repair shop; it is a healing garden. And the physician is not a mechanic, but rather, a co-creative healing partner who guides the patient along a path toward health. In the ecology metaphor, words and images such as interweaving, tapestry and journey and concepts such as balance, harmony, integrity, diversity and community are integral. These terms help shape our views of responsibility for self and others; quality of life, and conservation of resources.

The truths of other healing traditions, such as Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, Native American

and tribal, are being discovered in our culture and integrated with our own medical knowledge. In the New American Medicine, there will be many pairings of healing traditions. For example, the ancient art of Qi Gong and the modern science of psychoneuroimmunology can be combined effectively to foster health.

More and more people are traveling throughout the world, bringing people closer to one another. Advances in communications are making instantaneous global information sharing a daily reality. As a result, people the world over are more aware of each others' healing traditions than ever before. This integration of knowledge from a wide variety of traditions is creating the New American Medicine right before our eyes.

There are many people who have contributed to the health revolution now underway. Some are so well-known that they have become almost brand-names. Their books are everywhere; their PBS video series flood the major TV markets; and their direct mail campaign materials fill our mailboxes. Their truths and wisdom have become marketable and lucrative in recent years. But there are also untold numbers of people all across America who are being changed by contact with new ways of viewing health and healing, and who are helping to advance that change themselves:

Patricia had spent 16 years running her own successful national business. Feeling she needed more in life, she began to study a wide range of new ways of thinking about life, community, health and healing. Today, she is about to graduate from a complementary healing school. What she has learned has changed her understanding of herself, other people and the nature of our interactions with one another. She is not yet sure how she will apply what she has learned professionally, but her new view of health and healing has already changed how she lives.

Amber was a mainstream American woman: married, mother of two, living in suburbia. On a ski trip to Aspen, Colorado, she became ill. While browsing in an independent bookstore, to her surprise, she found herself drawn to a book about the nature research center in Virginia called Perelandra. She had a great love of nature, and knew a lot about wildflowers, but had not previously had any interest in alternative health. In particular, she became interested in the healing power of Perelandra flower essences. She became enthralled by what she read, and today, flower essences are an important part of how she maintains her health.

Micaela was working in the travel industry when she felt the need to change her life in some basic ways. She had long had an interest in art. In addition, on the job, she found that she had an affinity for and rapport with, customers who were seniors. She decided to volunteer at a local nursing home and to use her art to work with people who were ill. Today, she has found a new career and a developed a new meaning in life because of her experiences with the healing power of art.

Two young mothers in the upscale section of a large city meet once a week at a renowned teaching hospital that offers infant massage for their babies. Baby massage is part of a new complementary wellness center at the traditional hospital.

A father who has long used complementary medical therapies takes his four-year old son to a Reiki energy healer regularly and the young boy speaks casually of auras and energy chakras.

In communities all across the country, from small towns with a population of 80 to major cities that are home to eight million, stories like these abound. The complementary care movement is driven by the people, not by the professionals. There is an intense desire among many for basic change in how they live their lives. And few issues affect daily life more directly than health and healing.

During the 20th century, a new form of medicine has been evolving in the West. Some call it “mind-body,” others bodymind. Still others use terms such as alternative, holistic and integrative to describe the new medicine that is being born.

Energy medicine is the name preferred by some. Energy medicine is the least acceptable today and the most controversial in many ways. Yet acupuncture, Ayurveda, biofeedback, color light therapies, herbal remedies, homeopathy, therapeutic touch, yoga—in fact, practically all forms of complementary medicine--involve working with human bioenergy. The concept of bioenergy or Life Energy is as old as human thought (to the ancient Greeks it was pneuma, to the Hindus, prana) and is familiar around the world as chi in China; baraka in North Africa, and po-wa-ha or orenda to Native Americans. However, it causes great consternation to those who adhere to the mechanistic scientific model. To such individuals, the concepts of bioenergy or Life Energy smack of mysticism.

My introduction to energy medicine began with the study of Sigmund Freud's pioneering discoveries about human unconscious life and sexuality, and advanced with my introduction to the bioscientific energy investigations of Wilhelm Reich. It was through Reich's science of the Life Energy—called Orgonomy—that I came to investigate many of the complementary approaches that are becoming part of the New American Medicine.

Reich called the Life Energy orgone energy, because he discovered it through his investigations of human sexuality and the function of the orgasm, and because he found that the Life Energy charged organic substances. It became clear that pneuma, prana, chi, baraka and many other terms had been used over the ages to describe this basic energy phenomenon. It also became clear that this primordial energy was at the heart of health and healing and at the center of most complementary medical modalities.

Reich wrote “I am well aware of the fact that the human race has known about the existence of a universal energy related to life for many ages. However, the basic task of natural science consisted in making this energy usable. This is the sole difference between my work and all preceding knowledge.” Reich's investigations of the orgone energy offer a comprehensive view of the life energy found in no other body of work. Previously, the Life Energy was a principle; with Reich's work, the Life Energy became demonstrable with scientific equipment, measurable and usable in health and healing.

The understanding of the Life Energy gained through the study of orgonomy provided a

foundation for developing deeper insight into the wide range of complementary approaches that human beings have developed throughout time. Orgonomy provided a body of scientific work that was broader and deeper than other systems and that advanced human knowledge significantly.

Reich is being re-evaluated today by a new generation. In his book *The Turning Point*, Fritjof Capra wrote that "Wilhelm Reich was a pioneer of the paradigm shift. He has brilliant ideas, a cosmic perspective, and a holistic and dynamic worldview that far surpassed the science of his time and was not appreciated by his contemporaries."

James S. Gordon, MD, Director of the Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington, DC, wrote "In medical school, and especially during my psychiatric residency, I kept turning to Wilhelm Reich's work. So far as I was concerned, Reich was a giant, the first person I knew to make the connections between political oppression, emotional suffering and disturbed biological functioning."

Ken Dychtwald, PhD, the author of *Bodymind*, wrote, "Much that Wilhelm Reich postulated 60-70 years ago has become recognized and appreciated worldwide. His breakthrough appreciation of the bodymind as a holistic unit set the stage for enormous advances and developments that have reshaped the fields of medicine, psychology, fitness and rehabilitation. As we turn the corner to a new millennium, Reich's pioneering work stands out as the 20th century's most innovative and comprehensive thinking regarding all of the ways in which the mind and body interact in states of health as well as disease."

This great change in health care in America is of enormous value to people of all ages in helping them to maintain or regain health, as well as in providing guidance in the development of health-creating ways of living. However, it will be the coming generations that will feel the full impact of, and reap more completely the benefits of, the New American Medicine.

In his later work, Reich focused on what he called "The Children of the Future." He believed that the fate of the human race would be shaped by the character structures of these children. He further believed that humanity could begin to find its way out of the current mess it is in if it focused its attention on loving, protecting and helping children find their own ways in life. "We cannot tell our children what kind of world they will or should build," he wrote in 1950. "But we can equip them with the kind of character structure and biological vigor which will enable them to make their own decisions, to find their own ways, to build their own future, in a rational manner."

The natural function of childbirth, and the unnatural procedure of routine circumcision, offer two excellent examples of how our world is changing for the better, however slowly. Fifty years ago, Reich wrote " ...everybody says, 'It doesn't hurt!' Everybody says, 'No, it doesn't hurt!' ...That's an excuse, of course, a subterfuge. They say the sheaths of the nerves are not yet developed. Therefore, the sensation in the nerves is not developed. Therefore, the child doesn't feel a thing. Now, that's murder. Circumcision is one of the worst treatments of children."



The great American medical societies still debate the value of circumcision and whether or not it harms the infant. There is even still debate about whether or not infants feel pain. In January 1999, a British newspaper reported that “Scientists have shown for the first time that newborn babies have a 'unique' nervous system which makes them respond to pain differently than adults. In research that has far-reaching implications for the medical and surgical treatment of infants, the scientists have found that newborn children feel pain longer and more sensitively.” It is only in the past 10 years or so that medical science has even acknowledged that infants and babies feel pain. Medical science presumed that the newborn's neurological system was too immature to perceive pain. Fortunately, it seems scientists are coming to understand what every mother knows instinctively or intuitively.

Increasingly, many adults in America are coming to reject routine circumcision for male infants (performed for hygienic or religious reasons). And female circumcision or genital mutilation (performed for cultural reasons) is finally being questioned in Africa and other parts of the world. The emerging new views on health and healing, human sexuality and bioenergy are contributing to this change.

In childbirth, which has too often been “medicalized” or “pathologized” in recent years, there is also a growing return to a more natural approach. Many women are choosing to work with midwives, and many hospitals and obstetricians are cooperating with the mothers and midwives. There is still a long way to go, but this cooperation is another sign of the integration of conventional and complementary approaches to health. “Either-or” is being replaced by “both-and.” Confrontation is yielding to cooperation.

In both instances, changing attitudes and practices about childbirth and circumcision mean improved health care and happiness for mothers and infants. This signals a more mature relationship among conventional physicians, complementary providers and their patients—to the benefit of all. It is the “Children of the Future” who will create their own world. It is up to the older generations to help where they can and step aside where they cannot. The development of the New American Medicine is certainly a positive contribution on the part of adults to the future of their children. The two photographs below illustrate in a simple way how we can all contribute our share to that better future.

The first picture is of infants tightly bound in swaddling clothes in a maternity hospital in Siberia. A nurse is holding one of the babies. Swaddling is an ancient, life-negative custom that inhibits the movement of the newborn and restricts the free flow of life energy in their bodies, setting the stage for future emotional and physical problems. Swaddling is a profound example of the type of treatment of infants and children that must be left behind as a new medicine is created.

The second photograph shows a baby minutes after its birth underwater at a birthing center in Southern California. The wife gave birth in a large tub of warm water with her husband's arms around her. The baby is in close contact with the mother; the parents in close contact with each other. This photograph is emblematic of the life-positive path that is available to medicine and society, a path that nurtures the Life Force in each of us.

The New American Medicine will take what is useful from ancient traditions, and leave behind what is not. It will use what works from Western biomedicine, and discard what does not advance human health and happiness. This will not be easy but it will be done. This patient-driven medical revolution in America will succeed because it is part of the unfolding biological revolution of mankind that is underway.

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