

The Untold/Hidden History of Western Medicine—Part 2

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Abstract

In this second part of my editorial on the untold/hidden history of Western medicine, I look at the many efforts of the past 2 centuries to balance disease medicine with health medicine. Many brave and visionary men and women founded and promoted health medicine

movements, but few were successful. I present here an overview of the key movements, why most failed, and what changed to allow health medicine (by whatever name) to finally endure.

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Introduction

A bit over 6 years ago, in editorial 18.3, “The Untold/Hidden History of Western Medicine—Part 1,”¹ I started to lay out the history of the development of understanding of health and disease that was largely dismissed by conventional medicine.

This follow-up editorial is not meant to be a historic document. Rather, it is my perspective and interpretation of the evolution of a body of thought that has paralleled and contrasted conventional medicine for centuries. Having started as one of the youngest NDs and now as one of the oldest, I have had the privilege and honor of having been involved in this time of transformation of medicine for over half a century.

This editorial varies from my normal rigorous approach to a topic with multiple references. Rather, the following are my observations on the origins of the concepts of naturopathic, integrative, and functional medicine, which have a much longer history than I believe most clinicians are aware of. As near as I can tell, there has been no comprehensive review of these ideas, and as has been said before, “the victors write the history books.”

I have many times written about and lectured on the dynamic research, political, and financial balance between disease medicine and health medicine. Examples can be found here.¹⁻⁴

Another way to present this idea is that there are basically 2 philosophies of Western medicine:

1. The human body makes mistakes and is the victim of disease; the role of the doctor is to intervene and take control. We can simplify this to “the interventionists.”

2. The human body evolved to be healthy; the role of the doctor is to understand what is impairing that ability and provide therapies that support the healing response. We can simplify this to “the nurturers.”

Each approach has great strengths and neither approach is complete by itself. Unfortunately, for most of the past 200 years, the interventionists had almost total control of the health care system. Essentially, all the resources and all the social support went to the interventionists. And unfortunately, the political bodies of the interventionists actively legally, financially, and socially suppressed the nurturers. So, although life-threatening conditions like out-of-control infection, serious injuries, and congenital birth defects were effectively cared for, the lack of understanding of the need to promote health meant that despite abatement of serious diseases, the health of the community progressively declined. We now suffer the highest burden of chronic disease in every age group ever in human history. This does not mean the interventionists were wrong, but rather their knowledge was incomplete.

My thesis in this editorial is simple: every few decades for almost 2 centuries a group of MDs in conventional medicine realized that a health care system dominated by interventionists/disease management was incomplete and that nurturing/promoting health was equally important. Some of these individuals simply practiced differently, while others worked to create organizations and movements to promote a health care system much more focused on producing health rather than waiting for major disease to emerge. Until recently, every attempt but one failed. What happened and what changed?

These MDs (often joined by PhDs and others), at great personal expense, moved into the nurturer’s world and tried to advance this body of knowledge. Most of the efforts failed, as they could not break through the stranglehold of vested interests. These adventures have

been known by many names: orthomolecular, ecological, holistic, integrative, functional, and so on. Interestingly, the first venture that succeeded was the conversion of naturopathy into naturopathic medicine.

Those interested in diving more deeply into the movements discussed briefly below will find informative the chapters written by historians George Cody and Heidi Hascall for the *Textbook of Natural Medicine*⁵ and articles written by Cody in *IMCJ*.

Please be clear I am primarily noting below the MDs who crossed over. There are many non-MDs who contributed to these efforts to create health care reform movements. Also, this editorial is about Western medicine. There are many other healing arts around the world, like Chinese medicine and Ayurveda, that have their own traditions and historic challenges.

The Early Movements

During the 19th century, while conventional medicine was working to establish dominance, many MDs tried to start health medicine movements. Conventional medicine called this time the “heroic age of medicine,” although we would today use different terminology to describe the bloodletting, mercury dosing, and so on.

Examples of movements and MD leaders during this time are found in Table 1. Please be clear, this is not a complete list of the movements or the individuals involved. Rather, I am trying to show that the ideas of health medicine have been around for a very long time.

Table 1. Movements and Leaders in the 19th Century

| Movement | Leaders | Concept |
|------------|----------------------|--|
| Homeopathy | Hahnemann | Stimulate innate healing |
| Eclectics | Beach, Felter, Lloyd | Scientific herbal medicine |
| Hygienics | Trall | Diet, hydrotherapy |
| Hygienic | Lane | Healthful living, avoidance of toxins, vegetarian diet |

Out of all of these movements, only homeopathy still has a significant following. But with no associated Western medical schools and controversial scientific support, its impact has been limited.

During this time, many other healing arts developed, such as herbalism, Thomsonianism, Grahamism, sanatoriums, hydrotherapy, chiropractic medicine, osteopathy, and naturopathy. The herbalists, chiropractors, osteopaths (though they now appear far from their roots), and naturopaths continue from this group.

Early/Mid-20th Century

During the mid-20th century, despite conventional medicine becoming more dominant, more health medicine movements were created (Table 2).

Table 2. Movements and Leaders in the Mid-20th Century

| Movement | Leaders | Concept |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Naturopathic medicine | Several ^a | The first physicians of health medicine |
| Ecological medicine | Dickey | Environmental medicine |
| Orthomolecular medicine | Hoffer, Pauling, Williams | Biochemical individuality |
| Anthroposophical medicine | Steiner | Integration of spiritual, physical, medical, educational, agricultural, etc of life |

^aWith some trepidation, as the history is not well documented, and only listing those with an MD degree: Kellogg, Lindlahr, Struck.

Late 20th Century

The late 20th century saw further evolution of movements in health medicine (Table 3).

Table 3. Movements and Leaders in the Late 20th Century

| Organization | Leaders | Concept |
|----------------------|------------------------|---|
| Holistic medicine | McGarey, Wright | The first attempt to combine the 2 schools of thought |
| Integrative medicine | Guarneri, Loomis, Weil | The first enduring effort to combine both schools |
| Functional medicine | Bland ^a | Greatly advanced the scientific foundation of the “nurturers” |

^aBland led a remarkable team: Baker, Galland, Hyman, Jones, Scott, Vojdani, this author, and other medical leaders.

Why Did So Many Attempts Fail?

Jeff Bland, PhD, and I have discussed several times why the earlier efforts failed and what we could learn to help functional medicine succeed. As I looked at the various factors, the following are my thoughts (in no particular order):

1. Too dependent on unique, charismatic leaders
2. No academic institutions
3. No licensing
4. Inadequate documentation
5. Inadequate science
6. Ineffective organizations
7. The American Medical Association was successful in suppressing virtually every movement

What Changed?

First, my apologies, as this next list may appear self-serving (and it is to some extent) but is, I think, accurate. I believe the convergence of several trends finally created the environment that allowed health medicine (by its many names) to finally evolve and endure:

1. Science caught up
2. Digitization of PubMed made science more accessible
3. Modern technology provided better opportunities for the mavericks to collaborate
4. Decreased travel costs allowed the regular convening of large conferences of like-minded clinicians

5. Formation of effective organizations
6. Publication in 1985 of the *Textbook of Natural Medicine* that compiled the research
7. Accreditation of Bastyr University
8. Limitations of the “interventionist” model became much more apparent

In contrast with earlier efforts to support these movements, the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine and the Institute for Functional Medicine created and maintained effective and enduring organizations.

The *Textbook of Natural Medicine* (conceptualized by Michael Murray who invited this author to collaborate) was the first major compilation of the extensive research documenting the validity of the “nurturers.” Few are aware that this textbook has been translated into 4 languages, with 100 000 copies sold to health care professionals (according to personal communications with the publishers, 50% were MDs). It provided the scientific foundation that helped establish the credibility of naturopathic, integrative, and functional medicine. Bastyr University was the first educational institution promoting health medicine ever accredited anywhere in the world. It demonstrated for the first time that health medicine could be recognized by academia.

Finally, the public became disenchanted with the dominance of disease medicine and started looking more favorably at “alternative medicine.” This shift was, in my opinion, due to 3 factors:

1. Progressively decreasing personal experience of wellness
2. Highest burden of chronic disease in every age group ever
3. Out-of-control health care costs that are bankrupting individuals and nations

Conclusion

First, my apologies to the many brave and visionary men and women who helped create these movements over the centuries who were not noted here. Please, please help increase their recognition by writing Letters to the Editor. My thesis is simple: we need a balance of both sides of medicine: disease medicine and health medicine. This is not a new perspective. Heroic clinicians, researchers, and advocates have repeatedly tried to establish this balance and many paid a heavy price for going against the orthodoxy and vested interests. A few were successful and changed medicine. But so many of the others paid the price and did not live to see the success of their visions.

References

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