





PSYCHO- NEURO- IMMUNOLOGY

THE POWERFUL IMPACT AND INFLUENCE OF THE MIND ON THE BODY PRODUCING CHANGES IN THE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE BODY, THUS CAUSING DISEASE SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.

There is a deep physiological truth in the Scripture which says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth up the bones.”¹

One of the latest research in mind-body medicine which has validated this biblical truth is the ground-breaking study called “Psycho-Neuro-Immunology”. We have for years heard about psychosomatic diseases which reveal the power of the mind over the body (from ‘psycho’, the mind and ‘soma’- the body).

The powerful impact and influence of the mind on the body producing changes in the physiology of the body, thus causing disease should not be underestimated.

Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) investigates the relationships between behaviour, psychosocial factors, the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems, and disease. Each system affects the others, enhancing and/or inhibiting processes elsewhere in the body. Research in this field has grown tremendously in recent years as science better understands the checks and balances of these interdisciplinary systems and processes.

Research and experience has shown that stress, worry and negative emotions produce changes in the body and its functions leading to depression, chemical imbalances in the brain as well as pain, disease and death. Negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, hatred, envy and even an unforgiving spirit sap and drain the life forces of the body.

One of the leading researchers in this field is neuroscientist Dr. Pert. She spearheaded this entirely new interdisciplinary branch of science (PNI) by uniting three classically separated sciences of neuroscience, immunology and endocrinology and their associated glands and organs into a multidirectional communication network, linked by information carrying molecules called (neuro)peptides. Dr. Pert provided PNI with a clear scientific language to use, that of peptides and their receptors, also known as “information substances,” thereby helping to legitimize the field. She conclusively states

“Thus, we might refer to the whole system as a psychosomatic information network, linking ‘psyche,’ which comprises all that is of an ostensibly nonmaterial nature, such as mind, emotion and soul, to ‘soma,’ which is the material world of molecules, cells and organs.”²

Dr. Pert’s research provides scientific evidence that biochemically the mind and body are indeed one and that our emotions and feelings are the bridge that links the two. She explains, “The chemicals that are running our body and our brain are the same chemicals that are involved in emotion.”³ This tells us that we had better pay more attention to understanding the power of our minds and our feelings (emotions) that directly and profoundly affect our health and well-being. Since the emotions are what unite the mind and the body then the one can definitely affect the other.

The brain is integrated into the body at a molecular level and therefore neither can be treated separately without the other being directly affected. According to Dr. Pert, our bodies are in fact our subconscious minds:





If your mind is impressed and fixed that a bath will injure you, the mental impression is communicated to all the nerves of the body. The nerves control the circulation of the blood; therefore the blood is, through the impression of the mind, confined to the blood vessels, and the good effects of the bath are lost. All this is because the blood is prevented by the mind and will from flowing readily, and from coming to the surface to stimulate, arouse, and promote the circulation. For instance, you are impressed that if you bathe you will become chilly. The brain sends this intelligence to the nerves of the body, and the blood vessels, held in obedience to your will, cannot perform their office and cause a reaction after the bath.

This is how the mind, the brain, the immune system and the body are intimately related to each other and can affect each other positively as well. The influence of the mind on the body, as well as of the body on the mind, should be clearly understood. A health educator and luminary once said, *“The electric power of the brain, promoted by mental activity, vitalizes the whole system, and is thus an invaluable aid in resisting disease. The power of the will and the importance of self-control, are both important in the preservation and in the recovery of health. The marvelous life-giving power to be found in cheerfulness, unselfishness, gratitude, should also be clearly understood. There is a physiological truth--truth that we need to consider--in the scripture, “A merry [rejoicing] heart doeth good like a medicine.” Proverbs 17:22.”*⁶

“In the end I find I can’t separate brain from body. Consciousness isn’t just in the head. Nor is it a question of the power of the mind over the body...because they’re flip sides of the same thing. Mind doesn’t dominate body, it becomes body.”⁴

Dr. Pert stressed that peptides and receptors, the molecules of emotion, can so interact with each other as to influence or produce substances which can cause such a powerful effect on the body, mind and emotions simultaneously. She cites the example of certain drugs (e.g opiates) and their effects on the body, mind and emotions of the abusers. This is the way she concluded in her doctoral focus how our emotions and thoughts become our physical body.

She offered an analogy to help clarify by stating, *“If the cell is the engine that drives all life, then the receptors are the buttons on the control panel of that engine, and a specific peptide is the finger that pushes that button and gets things started.”*⁵

So if we really believe that eating an apple will affect us negatively, it most certainly will. If we really believe that taking a cold shower will affect us negatively, it most certainly will.

Researchers such as Dr. Pert looked for the physical links that allow the immune system to respond to psychological factors such as the will to live to a certain date (e.g a son/daughter’s wedding, or that happy people live longer) as against how stress, hostility and depression can impact the immune system negatively. There are also studies aimed at showing the tremendous benefits of happiness and positive emotions on clients’ health and wellbeing.

The same nineteenth century writer best articulated this phenomenon some 60 years before it was discovered by medical science in the following words:

“The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death. Disease is sometimes produced, and is often greatly aggravated, by the imagination. Many are lifelong invalids who might be well if they only thought so. Many imagine that every slight exposure will cause illness, and the evil effect is produced because it is expected. Many die from disease, the cause of which is wholly imaginary. Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is

health to the body and strength to the soul. “A merry [rejoicing] heart doeth good like a medicine.” Proverbs 17:22. In the treatment of the sick, the effect of mental influence should not be overlooked. Rightly used, this influence affords one of the most effective agencies for combating disease.”⁷

Last but definitely not least, health is much more than the absence of illness. Live in an unselfish way that promotes a state of spiritual happiness and cheerfulness that truly helps to prevent illness. Wellness is trusting in God and in the ability and desire of your bodymind to heal and improve itself, if given half a chance. Take responsibility for your own health—and illness.

References

Proverbs 17:22.

Pert, Candace. *Molecules of Emotion: Why You Feel the Way You Feel*, (Scribner, 1997)

White, E. G. “Education”, page 197. White, E. G. “Counsels on Health”, page 344.

BY SAUL LEACOCK

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