

DOCTORS SEE THE LIGHT

Vitamins, Placebo Effect & Rationalism

By Todd Fiorentino

Many doctors have really come around on the alternative medicine issue. Here in Bennington, VT, an Integrated Therapies Department works directly in the hospital, which is how it should be. Why are Western medicine and alternative therapies at odds? Nowadays, it doesn't seem like doctors are that resistant to these therapies; it's more the insurance companies that don't want to pay.

Once surgeries were conducted with only acupuncture for anesthesia in China, that kind of put to bed the idea that acupuncture didn't work. And with chiropractic often covered by insurers, it's really a whole new world! Consider vitamins, which were thought of as alternative or holistic medicine initially, used by people concerned with prevention rather than just responding to disease/symptoms. Now, vitamins are administered for pregnancy and in various forms at hospitals, pre and post-surgery.

Nutrients provide the building blocks that your body needs to carry out its many vast functions. The body is so intelligent, cells are intelligent. Did you know that if enough nutrients aren't getting to the fetus in pregnancy that food is automatically directed to the baby's brain because it knows this is the most important part. In such cases, the baby is born with less developed limbs and a fully functioning brain. It's fantastic, really!

The movie, "What the Bleep Do We Know," did a good job of visually showing how chemicals in our body move to receptor sites (in our brain) in a lock and key fashion. The vitamins/nutrients we take in allow for those chemicals and enzymes to be produced, which then travel to the correct site. Pollution, malnutrition and a whole host of other factors can interfere with this process resulting in changes in our mood, outlook on life and the way we feel.

So it appears that the scientific model is just one way, one avenue for thinking about problems. While it has yielded great results (imagine all of the people who would not be alive today without medical intervention) and kept out the quackery, it has also limited our universe. Rationalism helps us to decipher between what can be proven and what can not, but it doesn't always tell us what is. The difficulty lies in that many things are true that can not yet be proven. To give an example, before we discovered the electron microscope, we couldn't prove a number of things about the micro-universe that surrounds us. Yet, the micro-universe certainly existed regardless.

Consider this in terms of alternative medicine. In some ways, it doesn't matter whether a modality can stand up to clinical trials. In some ways, it doesn't matter if it is a placebo effect that's working. Afterall, many pills given out by doctors are working on the same placebo effect. (It's been shown that the confidence level of a doctor when he writes a prescription affects the outcome.) Yes, ideally, we would have hard evidence for each treatment and we would be able to isolate the variable in all cases. But we don't live in a perfect world. And if it brings relief, hey! In my mind, that's a good thing.