

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE COMPLEMENTS STANDARD

Various Forms Focus on Holistic Concepts

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"There is a deep yearning for a human (whole) approach to medicine."

—Bill Moyers¹

It is no secret that the American healthcare system is crumbling under its own economic weight. Aside from prohibitive medical costs, deeper concerns exist that treatment is less than comprehensive and complete—even outdated. The current model of Western medicine is slowly being replaced by what is commonly referred to as the "holistic approach."

In this model of healthcare, the physical aspect as well as the mental, emotional, and spiritual components of well-being are considered to play a crucial and equal role in one's state of health. This holistic approach includes several forms of alternative healing that are quickly gaining acceptance by the American public; a recent Harvard Medical School study, for example, found that more than one-third of Americans partake in some form of alternative medicine, usually at

their own expense.² Alternative medicine practitioners do not contend that their approach to healing is superior to conventional Western medical practices, but that it should be used to complement the current accepted standard of healthcare. A combined approach that addresses physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health treats the whole person. In this approach, spiritual health is best defined as an evolution of higher consciousness developed through the integration of three facets—a personal value system, a meaningful purpose in life, and nurturing relationships (with self and others)—to promote connectedness through a higher power, displayed through love and compassion.

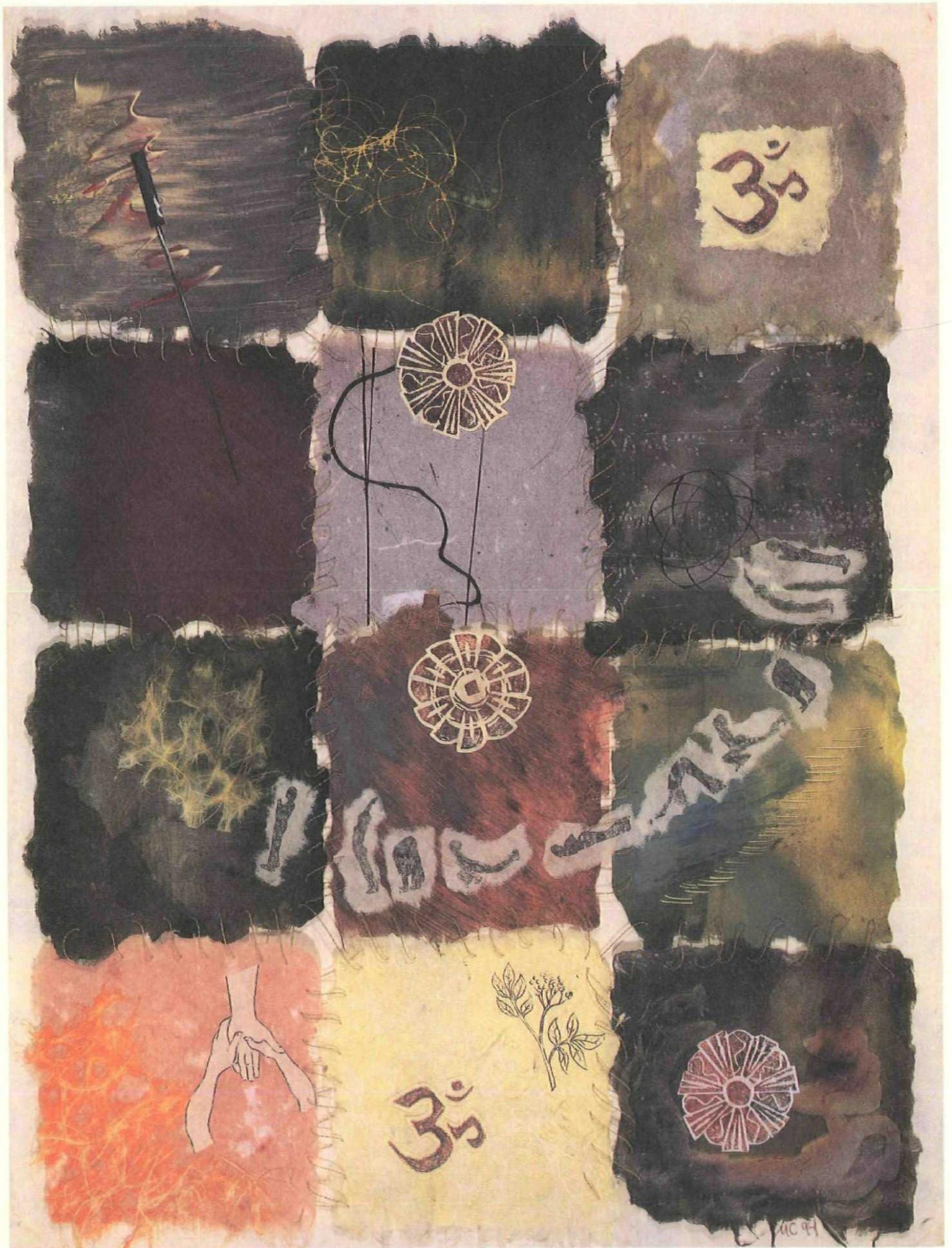
Potential merits of alternative medicine have not gone unrecognized at the legislative level. A handful of holistic healthcare practitioners were among those chosen to consult with the Clinton administration's Task Force on Health Care Reform.³ And in 1992 the U.S. Congress allocated more than \$2 million to the National

Summary Western or conventional medical practices are founded on the principle of Newtonian physics; the body is viewed as a large clock whose broken parts are fixed or replaced. The placebo effect, hypnosis, psychoneuroimmunology, and spontaneous remission have recently inspired researchers to look beyond this mechanistic model toward a new paradigm of greater understanding regarding the entity we call "human beings."

The premise of alternative medicine, based on the paradigm of whole systems, suggests that human beings are more than physical bodies with fixable and replaceable parts; they are a complicated network of pulsating energy frequencies often described in terms of a human aura. Western

researchers now call this "the human energy field." Homeopathy, acupuncture, polarity healing, and the healing power of touch are only a few of the more common branches of holistic medicine that unite body, mind, and spirit for optimal health.

The U.S. Congress has appropriated more than \$2 million to the National Institutes of Health to research the validity of alternative or complementary medicines. In light of proposed changes in the healthcare system, alternative medicine may eventually be incorporated into the American structure of healthcare delivery. Proponents of holistic medicine agree that various forms of alternative medicine should be used to complement, rather than compete with, the current accepted standard of healthcare.



Institutes of Health (NIH) to investigate various alternative healing practices. Aside from the more common practices targeted for research (such as chiropractic medicine and massage therapy), other healing modalities being examined fall under the domain of spiritual healing: prayer, the human energy field, and the healing power of touch.

Although the concepts of healing and curing are similar but not identical (curing relieves symptoms, whereas healing brings about a sense of inner peace), what was regarded as an esoteric, if not intangible, concept for thousands of years is now coming to light scientifically through a shared knowledge from the fields of quantum physics and psychoneuroimmunology (mind-body science). To understand this paradigm shift and the new direction of Western medicine, we must look backward to see where we have been.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS

"By comprehending that human beings are energy, one can begin to comprehend new ways of viewing health and illness."

—Richard Gerber, MD⁴

The Mechanistic Model For the past 300 years or more, the Western world has adopted a mechanistic model of reality, drawn in large part from the philosophical beliefs of René Descartes (that mind and body are separate) and the laws of physics created by Isaac Newton. The mechanistic paradigm compared the universe and all its components to a large mechanical clock where everything operates in a sequential form. The mechanistic (or reductionist) model seemed to logically explain nearly every phenomenon through the interpretation of stimuli by the five senses.⁵

Strongly influenced by Newtonian physics, the field of medicine, applied the mechanistic model to the human organism, comparing the body to a clock and focusing on symptoms of dysfunction. Like watch repairers, physicians were trained to

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fix or repair any broken parts. Drugs and surgery became the primary tools forged in the discipline of clinical medicine. Prime examples of the fix-or-replace method include the prescription of penicillin and the transplantation of organs.

Many advances in clinical medicine have been nothing less than astonishing, of course. Yet, in this mechanistic model of reality, anything that cannot be

repeatedly measured or quantified has been virtually ignored. Moreover, anything that cannot be scientifically explained by cause and effect has been dismissed as superstition and regarded as invalid. Such has been the case with several "alternative" healing methods, including acupuncture, homeopathy, massage therapy, music therapy, polarity healing, reflexology, and the healing power of touch.

What the mechanistic medical paradigm failed to incorporate was the dimension of the human spirit, an unmeasurable source of energy with a potential healing power all its own. Recently, however, the role of spirituality has begun to be recognized as a valid aspect of total health and wellness, as reflected in the World Health Organization's statement that "the existing definition of health should include the spiritual aspect and that health care should be in the hands of those who are fully aware of and sympathetic to the spiritual dimension."⁶

Whole Systems Theory Our way of viewing the universe changed dramatically when Albert Einstein introduced his theory of relativity in 1905. In simple terms, Einstein said that all matter is energy, energy and matter are interchangeable, and all matter is connected at the subatomic level. No single entity could be affected without all connecting parts being similarly affected. In Einstein's view, the universe was not a giant clock, but a living web.

This idea of a connecting web has become the metaphor of a new paradigm—called the whole systems theory—which views reality holistically, the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.⁷ Similar to Einstein's view of the universe,

the human body is now being looked at holistically. The aspects of mind, body, spirit, and emotions are seen as interacting in a way that can either enhance or suppress one's level of well-being. Currently, much attention is being given to the spiritual dimension of consciousness as the foundation to health and well-being. Such phenomena as spontaneous remission, the placebo effect, multiple personality disorders, and the healing power of touch point to the fact that our former way of understanding human health and illnesses, perceived by the five senses, is incomplete.

As with any change, this new appreciation has created a wake of confusion for many healthcare professionals dogmatically tied to the mechanistic model of medicine. Yet several health practitioners, including Bernie Siegel, Larry Dossey, Joan Borysenko, Dean Ornish, Deepak Chopra, and Candace Pert, do not agree with the mechanistic mentality (see **Box**). A new vision of a very old theory is slowly beginning to reshape the field of

conventional medicine. What is coming to be understood, and to a lesser extent clinically documented, is that the mind and the brain are two separate but interrelated entities, and that each body exists in an energy field of consciousness.⁸

THE HUMAN ENERGY FIELD

"The soul is a holistic concept."

—Larry Dossey, MD⁹

According to the new paradigm, a "life force" of subtle energy surrounds and permeates us all. The Chinese refer to this as *Chi* or *Qi*, the Japanese call it *Kei*, and the Hindu give it the name *prana*. In Western Christian culture it might be more easily recognized as the Holy Spirit. And where brave souls dare to tread on the fringe of Western medicine, this goes by several more technical names, including "subtle energy," "bioplasma," and "bioenergy." In the Eastern culture this life force of energy is said to be that which connects everything. In its simplest under-

LEADERS IN MIND-BODY SCIENCE

Among the noted leaders in the field of mind-body science are the following:

• **Joan Borysenko, PhD**, cell biologist and clinical psychologist, was the co-creator of Harvard's Mindbody Clinic with Herbert Benson. She also wrote *Minding the Body and Mending the Mind* and *Fire in the Soul*. An early advocate of the connection between mind and body, she now defines stress as a disconnection with one's higher self.

• **Deepak Chopra, MD**, an endocrinologist trained in India and the United States, has begun to integrate Auyvedic medicine as a complement to Western medicine at the Sharp Clinic in San Diego, CA; he wrote *Quantum Healing* and *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*.

• **Larry Dossey, MD**, internist and former chief of staff of Medical City Dallas Hospital is co-chair of the Panel on Mind/Body Interventions, Office of Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health; an advocate of the healing power of prayer; and author of *Space, Time and*

Medicine; Meaning and Medicine; Recovering the Soul; and Healing Words.

• **Jon Kabot-Zinn, PhD**, founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, is an advocate of mindfulness meditation as a healing modality and author of *Full Catastrophe Living*.

• **Patricia Norris, PhD**, psychologist and director of biofeedback research at the Menninger Foundation, Topeka, KS, was a pioneer in visualization as a complementary healing modality with biofeedback. She also wrote (with Garrett Porter) *Why Me? Harnessing the Healing Power of the Human Spirit*.

• **Dean Ornish, MD**, director of Preventive Medicine Research at the School of Medicine, University of California-San Francisco, created a holistic approach to cardiac rehabilitation, which added meditation and talk sessions about life meaning to the exercise and diet routine and clinically documented a reversal, of atherosclerosis in

the coronary arteries of several patients.

• **Candace Pert, PhD**, former chief of Brain Biochemistry at the National Institute of Mental Health, made the scientific discovery that neuropeptides, once thought to be secreted only in the brain, are synthesized by white blood cells throughout the body and that lymphocytes communicate to each other without the aid of the nervous system.

• **Bernie Siegel, MD**, is a general surgeon who began using complementary healing techniques such as visualization and art therapy to aid the healing process of several cancer patients. He is founder of Exceptional Cancer Patients in New Haven, CT, and author of *Love, Medicine and Miracles* and *Peace, Love and Healing*.

• **Carl O. Simonton, MD**, author of the book *Getting Well Again*, initiated complementary techniques, including art therapy, visualization, and mental imagery, with terminal cancer patients to discover that some were no longer designated as terminally ill.

standing, it is the "glue" of the universe. From a divine perspective, to be filled and equilibrated with this energy is to be at peace with oneself, to be "one with the universe." From this simple description one can see that subtle energy has a strong spiritual quality.

For more than two millennia, various healing practitioners around the globe have insisted that the human entity is

more than just a physical body. From their descriptions in the esoteric literature, we learn that human beings comprise layers of energy (vibrational frequencies) of which the physical body is the most dense. The less dense energies, invisible to the naked eye, superimposed on yet able to permeate the physical body, are described as pulsating frequencies that make up the human aura. These layers of the auric field are identified as the *etheric* (that closest to the body), the *astral* (the next layer associated with emotional thought), the *mental* (three tiers of consciousness, including instinct, intellect, and intuition), and the *causal* (the outermost layer, which is associated with the soul). In turn, each layer of the auric field is associated with a specific realm of consciousness.¹⁰

In a state of optimal health, all frequencies are in harmony, like a finely tuned piano. A disruption in the harmony of frequencies is said to lead to illness and disease. The interface uniting these human frequencies to the physical body is a combination of two systems referred to as "chakras" and "meridians." Perhaps the most recognized among these is the "crown chakra," often represented as a halo over one's head. Currently undetectable by scientific instruments, these chakras act as "transducers" between the various layers of subtle energy.

Similar to the chakras is the meridian system: a network of interrelated points throughout the body allowing for the passage of energy between the physical and subtle bodies of energy. In bioenergy work, healers such as Mietek Wirkus, Ethel Lombardi, Barbara Brennan, Dolores Krieger, and others apply the healing power of touch to restore the integrity of each patient's auric field.¹¹ They do this by acting as a channel

Energy and

 consciousness may be

 related in cases where

 healing takes place.

for the universal energy to restore harmonic equilibrium and clear energy disturbances in a person's energy field, which surrounds and permeates the physical body. This process is similar to starting a car battery with jumper cables. Ironically, healing can take place regardless of the patient's belief system; several studies conducted on babies, plants, and animals show significant results

without any indication of faith or belief in the healing process.¹²

The process of restoring harmonic equilibrium through energy transfer is described in physics as "entrainment."¹³ In physics we learn that when two or more objects produce oscillations in close proximity, the dominant frequency prevails. Eventually, the objects "entrain" (or oscillate) together in a unified frequency.¹⁴

Apparently, the human body is greatly influenced by various subtle vibrations, produced either by one's own emotional energy field (anger and fear) or by that absorbed through electromagnetic fields, such as high-tension wires.¹⁵ We are now learning from various research studies that distortions in the human energy field can be positively affected by individuals who are trained in the healing power of touch—a healing process that seems to employ some form of consciously directed energy.¹⁶ This energy is acknowledged by some, but its mechanism is not entirely understood by Western researchers in the fields of physics and psychoneuroimmunology. As depicted in Bill Moyers's television special and best-selling book, *Healing and the Mind*, where he devotes considerable time to the study of Chinese medicine and *Chi*, the answers to questions that arise may initially be found in the Eastern culture.¹⁷

HEALING: A NEW FRONTIER

"Consciousness, we will discover, has many quantum properties."

—Deepak Chopra, MD¹⁸

In the Chinese philosophy, illness is not necessarily a surprise encounter with a virus or bacteria,

since these surround us constantly. Disease and illness are a result of congestion or blockage of *Chi*, a disruption of the flow of energy at that point of the energy-matter interface, which in turn may be a function of some type of "spiritual crisis" (involving values conflict, purpose in life, or disconnected relationships). As professed in the healing art of acupuncture, when the meridians are blocked, "energy" becomes congested, flooding some body regions, while denying energy to other areas. The result is a compromised immune system, which makes the individual more susceptible to foreign invaders.

Western researchers are learning that the immune system is not confined solely to the white blood cells circulating throughout the body, but in fact may be a much larger network directly united to the human energy field. It is well documented that various conscious states can significantly enhance or suppress immune function.¹⁹ Researchers like Candace Pert even suggest that these distortions originate at a conscious level *outside* the body.²⁰ New research studies focus on understanding the healing relationship between consciousness and the human energy field. Healers from around the world, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity, describe this energy channeled through the body as a function of the healing power of love. It is now speculated that this healing energy and consciousness, also thought to be a form of energy, may be directly related, if not identical in cases where healing takes place. Perhaps one of the most interesting forms of alternative medicine being studied is the healing power of prayer.²¹

Western medicine is on the verge of a transition, where the conventional means of treating patients with drugs and surgery is slowly giving way to a more comprehensive system that includes alternative therapies based on the integration, balance, and harmony of the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual components of well-being. While the intent to investigate various types of alternative medicine has been well received by practitioners in holistic medicine, it may be that current limitations in both language and technology make Western science unable to measure the spiritual aspects of healing. Perhaps as more sound research is conducted, combining the expertise of individuals in the fields of physics, psychology, medicine, and psychic healing, a clearer understanding will emerge, making the shift to this paradigm a peaceful one. □

NOTES

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