



PSYCHOSOMATIC DISEASE: THE MIND AND BODY CONNECTION

How Identifying the Cause of Disease Can Lead to Successful Treatment

By D. Graeme Shaw, M.D.

As an internist, I'm fascinated by the cause of disease. Just as every crime mystery has a perpetrator, every disease has a cause. The closer you get to identifying the cause of disease, the more effective the treatment.

One axiom I follow is that the further away the target of our treatment is from the actual cause of the disease, the more difficult and stronger the treatment must be in order to be effective. And the corollary is that *the closer the treatment is to the cause, the easier it can be to create an effective treatment.*

This may explain why things like herbs and homeopathy can be so effective for the body, whereas a combination of the strongest medications may be only partially or temporarily effective on symptoms, or even completely ineffective and coupled with related side effects.

For example, we know that a heart attack is caused by the abrupt blockage of blood flow to an area of the heart. The blockage may have been caused by a blood clot, arterial spasm or the progressive layering of cholesterol plaque. And what causes that may be inflammation of the blood vessel lining or cell membrane hyperexcitability.

Behind that may be oxidative stress, cell membrane dysfunction and/or nutritional and metabolic deficiencies. And causing that may be poor diet, low-grade infections, stress, etc.

Behind all of these physical changes there may be other energy changes that affect the function of the cells. Perhaps those could be emotions that interfere with the cell membranes function, as I suggested in my article "[Stress: an Eastern Medicine Point of View](#)" which described

the effects of emotions on the neurotransmitter receptors of the cell membrane.

Mindbody connection confirmed

If grief may be an energy that affects lung function, what emotions might affect the cells in heart disease? In two recent articles, the *Journal of American College of Cardiology* (March 17, 2009) reported that patients with anger, hostility and depression have a much greater chance of developing heart disease.¹

Physical diseases that have their cause in the mind and emotions of a patient typically are referred to as 'psychosomatic.' While this term implies that these diseases are imaginary and fictitious, they can be very real, painful, debilitating and sometimes fatal. Due to the negative connotations of the word psychosomatic, "mindbody" has been suggested to describe these diseases.

Author and Physician John Sarno's book, "[The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain,](#)" includes an impressive list of mindbody ailments, including well-known ones such as tension headaches, migraines, ulcers, back, neck and shoulder pains, sciatica, tension myositis syndrome and repetitive stress injuries. Also included are other disorders such as skin diseases, immune dysfunction, tinnitus, arthritis, autoimmune diseases, digestive dysfunction, atrial arrhythmias, hypertension, arteriosclerosis, mitral valve prolapse and even cancer.³

The mind suppresses negativity

Based on current research, many of the disorders associated with heart disease

may actually be considered to be "mindbody" diseases.^{1, 2} So what is the purpose and reason for mindbody illnesses? The mind is designed to be a stable vehicle of thought and self-awareness. To perform its duties it may have to exclude painful memories from its awareness that could possibly disturb its function or overwhelm it.

The mind has one major defense mechanism for filtering negative, and possibly destructive, thoughts, and that is to suppress unpleasant, unwanted, unprepared-for thoughts from our consciousness and put them in our sub- or unconscious.

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Now it would be fine and dandy if these repressed or suppressed thoughts stayed buried in some deep, dark area of the memory, never to be heard from again. But actually, they have a way of entering our consciousness indirectly. The well-known psychologist C.G. Jung said, "The unconscious is always projected."

Dealing with emotions on physical level

We project unconscious thoughts and emotions both externally and internally; what we fail to see about ourselves is projected onto others. If you are not aware of your own anger, hostility, depression, fear or anxiety, then it becomes projected onto other people and you see them as angry, hostile, depressed, fearful or anxious.

Another way these unconscious thoughts and moods show up is through

internal projection affecting our physical health. In other words, we project our unconscious emotions into our bodies. Rather than being stored away or hidden, these repressed thoughts and emotions show up in our bodies as ailments. So instead of dealing with emotions on a psychic level, we end up dealing with them on a physical level.

To give you a recent example, I had the pleasure of helping a young man who had severe cardiovascular disease. He not only had hypertension and coronary artery disease, but also had tearing in his major vessels (aneurysms) that required the surgical removal of part of his heart and aorta to save his life. He was on several medications and nutritional supplements.

It wasn't until the end of our hour-long visit that he admitted he had been abused as a child and had a difficult time dealing with the ramifications of it, including despair, guilt and anger. I realized then that he was dealing with his pain on a physical rather than an emotional level. He was suppressing something that was "tearing his heart out," both literally and figuratively.

Healing starts with self-awareness

Many of my patients ask me what they can do to help their mindbody to better deal with these stored emotional traumas. Ultimately, I believe that overall healing comes from self-awareness. Until that occurs, I often suggest they focus on supporting their body with a healthy diet, moderate and consistent exercise, natural dietary supplements such as Get Well Natural's *Cardio Well Classic*, *Calm Ezz*, *Calm Well* and/or *Dandelion Root*, as well as dozens of drug-free therapies that can help them deal with repressed emotions.

The self-discovery of the disease (or 'dis-ease') in all of us often entails a painful raising of awareness of the cause. Changing the way we think or feel is one of the most challenging tasks we face. Those who avoid this painful journey, whether it be changing emotions, thoughts, lifestyle choices, dietary problems, addictions, etc., may be compelled to treat physical symptoms that never seem to completely go away.

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Success in health often means the ultimate struggle of discovering the cause. The reward could very well be a life of disease-free health.*



D. Graeme Shaw, M.D.

Footnotes:

1. "Anger, depression, and anxiety in cardiac patients: the complexity of individual differences in psychological risk," by J. Denollet and S. S. Pedersen, J. Am. Coll. Cardiol., March 17, 2009; 53(11): 947 - 949.
2. "Depression and Risk of Sudden Cardiac Death and Coronary Heart Disease in Women: Results from the Nurses' Health Study," by William Whang, MD, MS, Laura D. Kubzansky, PhD, MPH, Ichiro Kawachi, MD, PhD, Kathryn M. Rexrode,

MD, MPH, Candyce H. Kroenke, ScD, MPH, Robert J. Glynn, ScD, Hasan Garan, MD, MS and Christine M. Albert, MD, MPH, March 17, 2009; 53(11):950-958.

3. "[*The Mindbody Prescription: Healing the Body, Healing the Pain*](#)" (Warner Books. ISBN 0-446-67515-6. Sarno, John E. (2006).

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