Approach Based on Holistic Model in General Medicine and Public Health: The Ice Cream Cone Effect

*Jose Luis Turabian

*Health Center Santa Maria de Benquerencia Toledo, Spain

Abstract

The holistic view, by maintaining that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, suggests that individual or community symptoms should not be seen as isolated, but as a pattern of disharmony in a system, that the mind and body are not separated, and that mental and emotional imbalances have physical effects and vice versa. Likewise, it suggests that the individual and community can not be treated in isolation from their life circumstances. Individual exists in many levels (or “domains”) of equal importance. None of these levels can be ignored in medical intervention; none can be reduced to another. By doing our job as doctors we often choose to concentrate on one domain in every moment. The “real net value” of medicine and public health is not the difference between what the health services achieves and what it “spends” but its ability to generate future “profits”. This capacity is a true systemic concept, since it is not derived from the isolated parts, but from the interaction between them. It is about the intangible possession that allows medicine and public health to continue to obtain gains above the expected normal or basic rate of profit. Thus, a holistic approach in medicine and public health is not the sum of the biological, psychological and social views, but for each of these partial views, there is a plus of value when working within a system. Therefore, in a holistic system, “the Biological” is more than the biological isolated; “the Psychological” is more than the psychological isolated; and “the Social” is more than the isolated social: For each of these domains there are added factors that denote the differences between the “systemic values” of the Biological, Psychological and Social parts of system. As in cone ice creams, the total ice cream is more than what fits in the cone.

Keywords

General Practice; Public Health; Holistic Health; Holistic Medicine

Introduction

Holistic comes from the Greek “holos” which means everything, whole, total. It is the idea that postulates how systems (whether physical, biological, social, economic, mental, linguistic, etc.) and their properties, should be analyzed as a whole and not only through the parts that compose them. The system as a whole determines how the parties behave.

Holism considers that the “whole” is a more complex system than a simple sum of its constituent elements or, in other words, that its nature as an entity is not derivable from its constituent elements. Holism defends the synergy between the parties and not the individuality of each one. The whole is greater, and different, than the sum of its parts [1, 2].

By using an approach based on the holistic model of medicine, “the body is the shadow of the soul”. The thoughts, desires and emotions of the mind affect to physiological processes and behaviors. It’s like directing an orchestra; if there is a good connection there is harmony, that is, absence of discrepancy between the parties [3].
Allopathic or orthodox medicine is governed by the masculine principle: reality is seen through its parts rather than the whole; it puts the emphasis on definitions, logic, order and hierarchy. It has focused on the mechanisms of disease and the body as a machine, as well as on cataloguing the symptoms of malfunctioning of that machine’s work. It has brilliantly discovered a technology to treat the symptoms of body mechanics. Control replaces cooperation. It goes more towards the response to the symptoms than to the progress of health.

But, holism or holistic medicine is influenced by the feminine: relationship functions and connections. Holism is a term that refers to perceiving reality as a whole; nothing is separate, but everything is part and related to the whole. Life is a continuous process instead of separate events. The disease is also in that continuous wave. Quality is more important than quantity and reality is perceived empathically or subjectively rather than intellectually. Reality only exists in relation. The observer is not separated from the observed.

Health and illness are not explained by a linear theory where if we add the parts we will have the “whole”. But it is a non-linear system where the set does not behave as the sum of all its parts [4]. Holistic medicine has new ways of examining biological processes. These new tools were unknown in the past. The basic goals in this field are to learn enough to be able to create a “healing climate” in which the self-healing abilities of the person and community can be achieved as an aid in medical protocol.

**Discussion**

There are 3 basic principles that we must incorporate to the diagnostic and treatment in general medicine and public health:

1. The individual exists in many levels (or “domains”) of equal importance. Divide these domains in Body, Mind, and Spirit is the most frequent in the Western tradition. None of these levels can be ignored in medical intervention; none can be reduced to another: the spiritual can not be reduced to the psychological; the psychological can not be reduced to the biological. Every disease must be seen as a malfunction of a total organism; for example, “cancer can not be seen as a disease of cells in the same way that a traffic jam is not a problem of cars” [5].

   By doing our job as doctors we often choose to concentrate on one domain in every moment. In an extreme example, in a perforated peptic ulcer, one can not talk about psychological situations or spiritual needs; after surgery and antibiotics, then you could start with the other levels. But, unfortunately, the trend in modern medicine is to stop at the first level: the biological. The basic concept of pathology -the disease- has been the “injury” that causes the symptoms. From Morgagni in the 1700 it was understood that if the injury is cured, the disease is also cured, and after that intervention the task of the medical professional is finished. In the field of psychotherapy, the concept of injury is equivalent to that of “trauma”: that is, an incident located in space and time that injures and produces subsequent effects. However, the same injuries and traumas do not produce the same effects in all people.

2. Each person (and community) should be seen as a unique, and should be treated appropriately to his characteristics. That is, treating the person, not as a single individual, but as a member of a group of individuals is anti-therapeutic; treating the community, not as unique, but as a part of a greater community is anti-therapeutic. We must try to activate the potential of the person and community instead of suppressing it based on our preferences and biases. This is hard; it’s about helping each person and community but following their own paths and rhythms. We need to be flexible and adapt to their needs (although there are obvious limits), not only in relation to techniques and rhythms, but also in the theoretical frameworks or basic models.

3. The person must be respected, and their autonomy in the therapeutic process favoured as much as possible. We should not focus on the problem, on what is wrong with the organism, but on what is good in that patient and community, in the “song that this patient and community sings”, in the enthusiasm in their lives. So, we have to ask ourselves: what has blocked the perception of living in that way in the past and how can we move in that direction? This “psychotherapy” has positive effects on the activity of the defence mechanisms and helps to respond to medical treatment and the public health interventions. It is necessary to mobilize the patient and community in the decision-making process, because that also mobilizes the individual and group immune system. When the patient collaborates in the decision making of a medical procedure there are fewer complications and the procedure works better.

   Specialization has become the only development path. Specialization and fragmentation are the inevitable
result of the mechanistic approach of medicine, with the body divided into its parts, and chemically manipulating, surgically eliminating, or changing the defective part as if it were a machine. However, it can be suggested that the dysfunctional is the relationship between the parts, and when the medicine studies in detail the parts of the body is losing the integral dynamics of life. With the progress of biochemistry, successes have been achieved in many medical interventions, but only as long as we reduce the problem to a biochemical phenomenon and have a drug to act in the opposite direction.

The holistic view, by maintaining that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, suggests that individual or community symptoms should not be seen as isolated, but as a pattern of disharmony in a system. The holistic approach to health suggests that the mind and body are not separated, and that mental and emotional imbalances have physical effects and vice versa. Likewise, it suggests that the individual and community can not be treated in isolation from their life circumstances.

In this scenario, the academic disciplines of general medicine and public health already contains in themselves a holistic germ [6-8], and this is one of its fundamental principles [9, 10]. Consequently, they should be able to incorporate the holistic approach in all his practical actions.

Health care in a holistic approach to health integrates data on molecules, cells, organs, individuals, families, communities and the natural and man-made environment. Extrinsic and intrinsic influences constantly challenge the biological networks associated with well-being. Such influences can deregulate the networks and allow biopathology to evolve, resulting in a clinical presentation [2].

Holism can be shown through the metaphorical use of an accounting concept: the “real net value” of medicine and public health is not the difference between what the health service achieves and what it spends but its ability to generate future “profits”. This capacity is a true systemic concept, since it is not derived from the isolated parts, but from the interaction between them. It is about the intangible possession that allows medicine and public health to continue to obtain gains above the expected normal or basic rate of profit.

Thus, A + B = C, or A = C - B, is not met.

The value of A will then is C minus an “adjusted” B, as follows: $A = C - B + (Br - B)$. The “r” factor denotes the difference between the “systemic values” of a part of a system, that is, its value when it “works within a system”. Therefore, in a holistic approach, C will be more than A + B, the difference being what we can call the “synergy value” or “holistic value”. The “systemic values” of the parts that make up a system can not be added: while C is more than A + B, Ar (adjusted) + Br are more than C. [11].

Thus, a holistic approach in medicine and public health is not the sum of the biological, psychological and social views, but for each of these partial views, there is a plus of value when working within a system:

Therefore, in a holistic system, “the Biological” is more than the biological isolated: Biological + (Biological x r1 - Biological). “The Psychological” is more than the psychological isolated: Psychological + (Psychological x r2 - Psychological). And “the Social” is more than the isolated social: Social + (Social x r3 - Social).

Where r1 factor denotes the difference between the “systemic values” of the part Biologic of system; r2 factor denotes the difference between the “systemic values” of the Psychological part of system; and r3 factor denotes the difference between the “systemic values” of the Social part of system.

**Figure 1**: The Ice Cream Cone Effect in Holistic Approach

When a holistic approach to medicine and public health is applied, being able to see and care for the person in their entire being, in continuous relationship with an environment and as a system of mutual relations [12, 13], the concepts of “cure”, “resolution”, “care”, “treatment”, etc. they take another meaning different from the usual one [14].

As in cone ice creams, the total ice cream is more than what fits in the cone Figure 1. We now know why the prices of ice cream cones will never be proportional to their sizes [15].
References


