



Could more be done to help the NHS, which is failing to stem the tide of chronic illness?

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The increasing incidence of chronic illness is presenting the NHS with one of the biggest challenges ever. It is not something that can simply be put down to the fact that people are living longer. A large part of it is due to the fact that the bodies in which we live have not had the opportunity to evolve and adapt to the different environment and lif styles that we follow in response to the high tech world in which we now live.

There is evidence to suggest that part of the problem is a result of medical interventions themselves, such as the drugs and procedures intended to restore health in the first place. Applying a more holistic approach to healing based on natural medicine could provide a safe, efficient and economical way to ease the burden which is threatening the ability of the NHS to cope.

The history of science has been a story of competing ideas as different scientists have come up with ever clearer hypotheses to enable them to get a better intellectual understanding about how things work. Due to the financial benefits that the legal patenting and copywriting of one invention or another can have in the market place, these competing interpretations of meaning have taken on ever increasing economic and political significance. Eventually, reconciliation of the conflicts between competing theories has come through and expanded our knowledge of the universe.

For instance, Lamarck suggested that organisms could adapt to prevailing conditions and that these adaptations could be passed on to their progeny. Then Darwin's theory of natural selection suggested that changes occur through genetic variance. Those that enable a recipient to survive in a more effective way in prevailing environmental conditions would pass it on in their genes to future generations. Those that do not adapt to their environment die out. The scientific community then dropped the Lamarckian hypothesis in favour of Darwin's concept of natural selection and survival of the fittest. Two recent discoveries have brought these theories closer together again: epigenetics and neuroplasticity.

Epigenetics and neuroplasticity

In contemporary terms it seems that people only express a small part of their genetic potential. The expression of different genes can be modified as a result of environmental influences. The environment in which genetic expression is realised is diverse and variable. According Prof Marilyn Monk (1) genetic reprogramming can still have an impact on future generations, including epigenetic modification from ancestors, pregnancy, birth and upbringing, all of which can affect us in many different ways. An example of this is found in the children born to Dutch women who were starved by the Nazis during the first trimester of their pregnancy. These children had an increased risk of obesity in adulthood as the result of epigenetic changes that their mothers experienced. It was a biological response to help them store and make the most of

every bit of food that they were able to find (2). Children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy experienced changes in their DNA which could affect their health for the rest of their lives (3). Such examples fall into the sphere of what is now termed 'Epigenetics'.

Neuroplasticity is defined as the ability of the brain to reorganise itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. It allows the neurons in the brain to compensate for injury and disease and to adjust their activities in response to new situations or to changes in their environment (4). In their book 'Neurobehavioral Disorders of Childhood: an Evolutionary Perspective' (5), Robert Melillo & Gerry Leisman provide extensively well-researched scientific evidence that the ability to change and adapt is much more than was ever thought possible (5 p. 257), and state that it is commonly known that the major cause of illness and death in adults are lifestyle disorders such as heart disease, cancer, arthritis and depression (5 p. 244).

The capitalist system of economics, if played out in a free market place, could be seen as a Darwinian system of natural selection and survival of the fittest. This could be regarded as a dominant left brain approach to thinking. At a time when some international corporate businesses have become so large, monopolistic and powerful that they are able to exert disproportionate amounts of influence, sometimes behind the scenes, even on national governments, it is obvious that the rules of natural selection no longer apply.

Ecology and health

A world that is controlled via currency that we call money, which is bartered in a kind of international gambling casino between players with influence on nearly all the elements on which our lives depend, has become completely out of touch with reality. The world is manifestly failing to reconcile capitalism with the human, moral and ecological realities of Man's ability to live peacefully together as a community in a sustainable way on this magical planet floating in the universe, that we now have the privilege to call home.

The Lamarckian concept of biological species finding within themselves the ability to adapt to the environment which we now know can be passed onto their offspring could be regarded as a more creative right brain kind of activity.

Through our imagination, creativity, work, production, distribution and consumption, it is the natural resources of the earth within the context of the greater Universe that are able to sustain life and contribute to a sustainable future: i.e. one of liberty, equality and fraternity, as the French put it so succinctly.

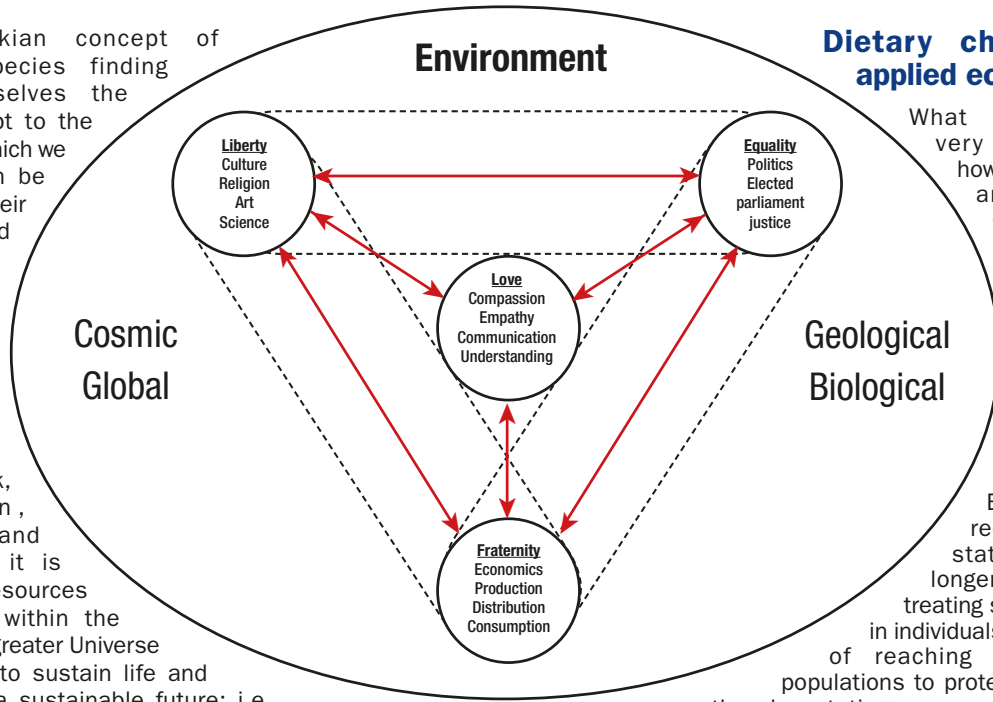
Today's society is paying a very heavy price for the combined effects of consumerism, poor diet (6) (7), inadequate exercise (8) (9), information overload, insufficient sleep, toxic environments, unhealthy lifestyles (10) and the fragmentation of local communities. The World Health Organisation, when it was first set up, described health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Many of us who work in the sphere of natural health will be aware that some of the patients we see, having first been to see their medical doctors, were simply prescribed a drug to hide a symptom for which they were seeking help (11). This would seem to be based on the presumption that the symptom that they had is due to the absence of a drug.

Current concerns

The average spending of the NHS per capita is now around £2,000 per year (12). The growth of chronic illness is now costing about 70% of the NHS budget and rising unsustainably (13). In association with this there has been a steep rise in the number of children suffering from conditions that have impaired their health, behaviour and ability to learn, such as autism. Statistics from the USA demonstrated a 6-fold increase in diagnosed cases of autism between 1990 and 2010 (14).

The ability of the educational establishment, the health services and social services to work together to help the next generation of growing children is failing miserably. According to a report from the Westminster Health Forum (15) almost 18% of pupils in schools have special education needs. An estimated 32% of girls and 11% of boys aged 15 self-harm, and 75% of adult mental health problems begin before the age of 18 and 50% by the age of 14. "the failure to intervene early in preventing mental health and other social problems costs the Government £17 billion a year and the annual short term costs with child with mental health problems are 1.58 billion, the long term costs 2.35 billion. In an average class of thirty 15-year olds, three could have a mental disorder.

Another matter that is not often mentioned but is of international concern, is the fact that for all the convenience the disposable consumer society offers us, it has not improved people's health, welfare and sense of personal fulfilment throughout the world.



Dietary changes and applied ecology

What has changed very considerably, however, is our diets and lifestyles. One of the key factors is the reduction in the micronutrients in food and the increase in toxins of many different kinds in our environment. Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF stated, "It is no longer a question of treating severe deficiency in individuals. It is a question of reaching out to whole populations to protect them against the devastating consequences of even moderate forms of vitamin and mineral deficiency."

(16). Practitioners who are in touch with the basic principles of natural health will not be in the least surprised about these concerns.

World Health Organisation recorded a worldwide epidemic fourfold increase in the incidence of diabetes since 1980 (17). 11% of the world's population now suffer from it. 90% being type two which related to the change in life styles, diets and reduced physical activity (18). In the UK it takes up 10% of the NHS budget (19).

Over 150 years ago, when orthodox medicine involved bleeding people, or prescribing laudanum, the founder of osteopathy, A.T. Still, said that "osteopathic lesions could be *primary* or *secondary* ... The list includes mental shocks, bereavement, loss of property or friends, poor diet, overeating, extremes of weather, poisons including micro-organisms and their toxins and medical drugs." (20 pp. 158-159).

By far the biggest contribution to health that has occurred in the last two hundred years has been due to improved housing, clean water, better sewage management, improved working conditions, fewer accidents, periods of relative peace and access to better diets. Other than in cases of acute injury, trauma and/or infection, which traditional medicine has been very successful at helping to resolve, most people will have the symptoms for which they needed assistance as a result of their own unique combination of accumulated imbalances which conventional medicine is unable to reach.

Symptoms are usually the way the body is signalling that it needs help; simply repressing them with a drug for example, may provide some temporary relief. Unfortunately, it usually results in greater underlying imbalances which accelerate the downward cycle into chronic illness which is now growing into a crisis of epidemic proportions (21) (22) (23). One of the principles of medicine is to "first do no harm". It seems that conventional medical approaches to treatment, being largely based on the study of illness rather than health, have simply been unable to control this downward spiral or may have actually, in some cases, contributed to the unnecessary suffering that it causes (20 p. 86).

Things could be in danger of becoming very much worse. Imperial College have sent out in March 2016 a letter to their alumni requesting a donation for £1,000 to confront one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity: "antimicrobial resistance which is a global threat that could send modern

medicine back to the dark ages. Microbial resistance is here in our hospitals now and growing at an alarming rate. If we fail to tackle it, simple infections could become life threatening, cancer treatments ineffective and routine operations like knee replacement impossible" (24).

Healing is the innate tendency of all living things to be whole given the right environment. Each person will have the difficulties that they experience for their own complex combination of reasons. Expertise is the ability to make finer distinctions and to match needs specifically in the most efficient way. A functional approach, using a combination of natural medicine matched individually to each person in measured ways, together with changes in lifestyle, has proved to be very much safer, more effective, and fulfilling for all of those involved.

Indeed, I have had phenomenal success with children using this approach. Over the past 30 years, I have developed a measurable series of tests and therapeutic treatments –The Sunflower Programme - based on the founding principles of osteopathy. This is now the copyright of a registered charity, the Sunflower Trust (www.sunflowertrust.com).

The Sunflower Programme balances brain and body to help children be the best that they can be. It has demonstrated convincingly that it helps children to become balanced and integrated, ensuring they feel better, increase their ability to concentrate, improve their performance, and enable them to get on better with others.

"Dear Mark,

To say you are a miracle worker is an understatement. The changes in M are remarkable. He is more confident, talks and keeps eye contact. He is more engaged and concentrates when he needs. I could go on and on. Thanks for making our family happy and enjoyable.

Yours sincerely, S."

Here is just one example of hundreds of cases that could be quoted from the parents of a child who have been through the Sunflower Programme:

There is no magic and this approach is not miraculous; it is just applied ecology: helping to create the right environment physically, physiologically, mentally and emotionally to allow the innate tendency of nature to get on with the job it knows best how to do, which is one of the underlying principles of osteopathy clearly illustrated by A.T. Still (20 p. 336). This approach to healing is verified by research and academic validation (25).

Responsibility and efficiency demand that you first do the least you need to do in the safest way possible. The knowledge is there for anyone with a good medical training, given the interest, open mindedness, and determination to learn. We need to encourage a health system that is underpinned by a concern to keep people well and one that has scope to include natural therapies as part of an intervention and prevention mentality. This would improve overall health and wellbeing and save a great deal of suffering and money in the process.

As members of a healing profession we have a duty to our patients to take into account not just the structural and functional aspects of the body but also the influence of external environmental factors, emotions, behaviours, diet, and lifestyle choices.

Evidence-based medicine relying on a case history, observation of some orthopaedic tests and palpation is not exactly a quantifiable, measurable clinical basis on which to assess the amazing variety of factors affecting many different aspects of the integral health of each and every individual patient. Long before conventional doctors understood the relationship between the musculoskeletal, the motor sensory system, the autonomic system and the auto-immune system, A.T. Still had worked it out (20).

We are holistic beings and nothing happens in isolation. Using functional neurology, combined with principles of natural healing, it is now possible to establish what these variables are. It is then possible on an individual basis to discover what the relationship is to the structural, nutritional, mental and emotional factors that even classical osteopathy, although aware of, was unable to do. It is then possible to address each of these and many other factors with exactly the right mixture of natural approaches to healing and to assess the outcome measurably.

Functional neurology is something that professionally trained registered practitioners can learn. It enables those with the skill to enhance their delivery of appropriate natural approaches to healing in ways that their patients are able to experience immediately with the inevitable effect of enhancing the worth and reputation of their clinics.

Prevention is by far the best policy for health. I would urge everyone to learn more about this pioneering approach and help to reverse the trend of increasing the incidence of chronic illness.

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“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought.”

Jonathan Swift

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