

1 INTRODUCTION

When I trained in conventional medicine, I always had the feeling that something didn't 'sound right' although it was difficult for me to precisely say what that 'something' was. I felt that the fabric of conventional medicine did not hang together in a logical way. I found there were many discrepancies and contradictions that were not addressed and in most situations actively ignored. However, at the time, I thought that this sense of a fruitless struggle with confusion was a problem that was unique to me. Sometimes it is said that to talk to a person who is insane can be very disconcerting since they may appear to be lucid, clear and rational. At the end of the conversation, you may realise that one of you is mad but you are not sure which one. This is how I felt about conventional medicine.

When I was in general medical practice I had a crisis of confidence in that I began to see that many treatments of conventional medicine not only produce little benefit but also can cause harm. This may not have been obvious at first but over months and years I came to see that drug-based treatment leads to effects that are frequently worse than the original problem.

It was only with my subsequent training in Chinese medicine that I came to see conventional medicine in a different light. The information gleaned from conventional medicine may be useful in helping practitioners understand their patients. It is when these ideas are translated into clinical practice that difficulties begin. I remember having a conversation with an acupuncturist and herbalist who grew up and trained in the Orient. He also had been educated in conventional medicine. He said that he had not really understood the connection in conventional medicine between diagnosis and treatment – how one led onto the other. Of course, there *is* no connection between these two things. The use of treatments is based on experience and of 'what works', that is, what seems to remove the symptoms, rather than any sound connection with deeper physiological processes or an attempt to treat the 'disease' that produced the symptoms.

This book is the result of those years of trying to make sense of conventional information. It seeks to transform the information into something that can help our practice of holistic medicine¹. In many respects it reflects the struggle we all have between the differing philosophies of holistic and conventional medicine. This is especially true for Westerners who have grown up with the belief that conventional medicine is *the* way to treat most disease states. This view is, of course, a minority view as the majority of the world's population subscribe to more holistic views of health and disease and if you live in China, India or most of the so-called Third World you have much more access to holistic methods of treatment.

The main aim of this book is to provide information to those who need access to conventional medical information that is clear and concise. In addition, it serves as a text that supports holistic practitioners not trained in conventional medicine. Since the first edition of 'The Manual of Conventional Medicine for Alternative Practitioners', which this book replaces and updates, it has become the set textbook at many colleges of acupuncture, homoeopathy and herbalism. Its accompanying Study Guide has become a favourite method of study for people training in such therapies.

In this book I have concentrated on describing processes in plain English. Many textbooks are aimed at medical students; hence they are very detailed and written in overly technical language. Whilst they are a useful source of information, they are not always easy to follow or necessarily relevant to the needs of holistic practitioners.

This book mirrors the way in which conventional medicine outlines 'systems' of the body. I have included all diseases that are commonly seen in clinical practice. I have omitted those diseases that are rare and unusual.

In each section I have arranged the information according to principles of *energetic* medicine and although they may appear unusual at first they are more helpful as they apply to the system of medicine we are using. All the references in the book to holistic medicine apply to ideas gleaned mainly from Chinese medicine, my own chosen field of practice, or of homoeopathy.

My other aim is to provide support to holistic practitioners so that the practice of such medicine can be strengthened. I hope in the future that methods of holistic medicine can be made more available. The way forward is to be competent and confident in our practice. Many practitioners I meet feel that they particularly lack confidence regarding serious conditions. They often project this insecurity onto their lack of training in conventional medicine. It is true that my training in conventional medicine has given me experience in seeing and treating more serious disease. However, it is important to emphasise that faith in holistic medicine and its ability to help sickness comes from competence in our chosen field. Therefore, any knowledge of conventional medicine must only be considered as subsidiary to our main practice.

Holistic medicine is our chosen therapy and the one that is most appropriate to the needs of the individual because of its ability to lead towards ‘cure’². Conventional medicine is complementary to this and would be better used either for structural problems incapable of any other help, e.g. trauma, or for life-threatening conditions.

Today, we see the opposite situation where holistic medicine is only used after a long period of conventional treatment. We live in a society that gives little weight to ideas of energy and the non-physical. Holistic medicine is criticised by those people who only give importance to material things. This, of course, is at the root of Western thought³ – a division between mind and body together with the unfortunate association that mind is unimportant or even non-existent. This constant message of division and the undermining of people’s belief in the non-physical affect us greatly. We lose faith in our ability to know ourselves and to heal ourselves. We rely on ‘experts’ who claim to know what is best for us. This disconnection at deep levels is, I think, primarily responsible for the great dissatisfaction and angst that is felt by so many people in the West today. It is no mistake when the sages of India and Tibet say we live in degenerate times.

Today, there is definitely a change in consciousness occurring that is gathering pace. There is increasing interest in holistic medicine, in self-help, in religious faith, in meditation and in matters that formerly were considered non-scientific and of little or no value. Such changes can only develop further, as the momentum for change becomes irresistible. In this climate and that of the future, doctors will find themselves increasingly isolated as people embrace more holistic principles. Major changes in health care practice will come from ourselves as we reclaim those powers we have so carelessly given away to science, dogmatism and the denial of our deeper selves. The role of holistic medicine and holistic practitioners will be increasingly important in the years to come.

This process will not be easy, as there are powerful groups with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. However, the power of the individual cannot be denied and as people become more aware of issues to do with the environment, caring for others, growth and self-development, nothing will be able to stop these changes taking place.

I hope that this book may, in some small way, help in this process.

– **Layout of the book** –

There are two assumptions I have made about those using this book. The first is they have a basic knowledge of anatomy and physiology. The second is that they have access to a medical dictionary. I have, as much as possible, written in plain English but there are a limited number of terms which I introduce where necessary.

The Chapter headings correspond roughly to the ‘systems’ of conventional medicine, e.g. cardiovascular, respiratory and so on. Each Chapter is laid out in similar ways:

- Introduction including energetic view of that system
- Anatomy and physiology it is useful to know as prerequisite to study of that system
- Diseases
 - Definition
 - Symptoms
 - Complications
 - Investigations
 - Conventional treatment
 - Holistic management
- Symptoms and how to recognise a serious situation

The section on holistic management includes information from the Chinese medical viewpoint⁴. This will be of use to acupuncturists and shiatsu practitioners but also to anyone with an energetic understanding of the human body. Homeopaths may see the symptom picture associated with a particular remedy here. I do not intend these sections to be exhaustive as this book is primarily about conventional medical knowledge. I hope it will enable you to see that it is possible to view conventional information from holistic perspective. This revised and updated edition also includes cases that were treated homoeopathically.

Comparisons between conventional and holistic medical systems need to be drawn with care. Conventional disease labels are fixed entities and apply to people with slightly different clinical pictures and widely different underlying energetic disturbances. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that conventional disease labels always correspond to a particular energetic picture. The whole point of holistic medicine is that seeks to treat the individual.

The listing of symptoms and how to recognise a serious situation is intended to reassure you that you are not dealing with a potentially dangerous condition and to recognise which situations may require referral to another practitioner.

NOTE: Nothing in this book should be construed as medical advice on an individual basis. I would urge anyone with a health problem that is chronic, severe or not responding to simple, self-help remedies to seek out appropriate advice and help from a competent practitioner – orthodox or holistic. It is your choice.

¹ There is a lot of debate about terminology of non-conventional forms of medicine. There seem to be three main terms employed. Complementary, alternative and holistic all have their advocates. As I explain later in this text, the word complementary (used by people to indicate treatment complementary to conventional medicine) would be more appropriately applied to conventional medicine so that it is only used when other forms of treatment are inapplicable or ineffective. To use the powerful methods of conventional medicine for all and as a first-line of treatment is frequently inappropriate. The term ‘alternative’ implies something instead of conventional medicine and although it has its value, all too frequently it is perceived as confronting and radical. I prefer to use the term ‘holistic’ which means whole, the whole person. It can be widely used to include all gentle, non-toxic treatments which seek to see the person as an individual, in a whole way and to provide them the means whereby they can become or remain ‘whole’. The word ‘healing’ means, of course, ‘to make whole’. The thrust of this book is to encourage and support the process of ‘becoming whole’, of ‘being healed’.

² I use the term ‘cure’ as it understood by homoeopathic medicine. The same principle, of course, also applies to any method of healing which is truly holistic. I discuss cure more fully in Chapter 2.

³ There is a vitalistic tradition to Western philosophy as evidenced by the work of Paracelsus. Homoeopathy belongs to this tradition. When I use the term Western as applied to medicine or philosophy in this book, I am referring to the main strand of science which has become dominant in the Western world, i.e. materialistic, physical.

⁴ I have not spent a long time in this book describing the theories of Chinese medicine since this is not my main aim and I do not want to overcomplicate matters. For anyone interested in the basic ideas of Chinese medicine I would recommend two books, ‘Between Heaven and Earth - A Guide to Chinese Medicine’ by Beinfield and Korngold, (Ballantine, 1991) and ‘The Web Which Has No Weaver’ by Kaptchuk (Contemporary Books Inc., 2000).