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A common platform for all systems of medicine

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Abstract

Practitioners of conventional scientific medicine may accept the occasional use of alternative systems but nevertheless keep them at a distance since they do not make sense to the scientifically trained mind. The FDA, the regulatory body in USA for granting recognition to treatment modalities, was expected to address this issue meaningfully, but a coherent understanding about alternative systems of medicine remains elusive. The UG medical student is faced with the situation of having to comprehend the alternate systems, much against the scientific temper that is essential for practicing conventional medicine. While treating any medical condition, three components of patient care can be identified in both conventional and alternative systems of medicine that respectively target the structure (*body*), influence the thought (*mind*) and connect with the feeling (*spirit*) of the patient. With respect to conventional medicine the three components may be termed as: Era 1 or Body Medicine, Era 2 or Mind-Body Medicine, and Era 3 or Mind-Body-Spirit Medicine. Each of these Era 1, Era 2 and Era 3 components can be viewed as ‘quanta’ of different eras, acting

simultaneously on the same patient, with each 'quantum' having its effect independent of what accompanies it. For students of conventional medicine, some familiarity with the theory concerning the 'body' component of alternative systems will suffice, since the 'mind' and 'spirit' components are common to all. Taking a 'quantum view of medicine' encourages a more purposeful and balanced use of all the three components by everyone.

Keywords: conventional medicine, alternative medicine, scientific temper, quantum view, common platform

Introduction: Those trained in conventional scientific medicine find it difficult to come to terms with the alternative systems of medicine [1]. Conventional scientific medicine, also called Allopathy, is based on an understanding of medicine in terms of physics, chemistry, biology and maths. In addition, an understanding of the emotional and behavioural aspects of human beings helps in the successful practice of medicine.

Recently, because of their acclaimed usefulness, alternative systems of medicine including Acupuncture, Hypnotherapy and what is known in India as AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy), are being increasingly accepted [2]. Practitioners of conventional medicine may accept the use of alternative systems as long as they are not harmful to the patient from the scientific point of view. But these complementary systems of medicine are nevertheless kept at a distance, since they do not make sense to the scientifically trained mind, in spite of empirical studies supporting their effectiveness.

In 1993 the US Congress decided that America should take a more scientific look at alternative medicine and established within the Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM). The FDA, the regulatory body in USA for granting recognition to treatment modalities, was expected to address this issue meaningfully but a coherent understanding about alternative systems of medicine [3] still remains elusive. This situation, in spite of the popularity and perceived effectiveness of the alternative systems, has led either to their reluctant acceptance or total rejection by the scientific community.

In India, Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani have been used successfully for the past several centuries and have become part of culture. As per CRMI (Compulsory Rotating Medical

Internship) regulations 2021 of the NMC (National Medical Commission), 7 days of AYUSH posting has been included within the one-year internship from 2022-23 [4]. Now, the UG medical (MBBS) student is faced with the situation of remaining in a state of denial or accepting alternate systems unquestioningly much against the scientific temper that is essential for practicing conventional medicine. In such a situation, a common platform for comprehending conventional as well as alternate systems of medicine has become more relevant.

The common platform: What is it that is common to all systems of medicine? Alternative systems have theories that do not fit into the basics of conventional medicine. However, every system of medicine can be found to address three components of patient care viz. body, mind and spirit. While managing any medical condition, these three components respectively target the structure (*body*), influence the thought (*mind*) and connect with the feeling (*spirit*) of the patient in varying proportions.

The three components in conventional medicine: Conventional medicine, until recently, was considered to address only the structural aspect but has now been shown to address all the three components. The evolution of modern medicine can be divided into three eras: – Era 1: Body Medicine, Era 2: Mind-Body Medicine, Era 3: Mind-Body-Spirit Medicine [5].

Era 1, since the 1860s, is plain old mechanical medicine. The body is not functioning properly, so the ‘doctor-mechanic’ uses whatever tools of treatment are available to fix the problem. Era 2 medicine since the 1940s, was initially about psycho-somatic diseases, arising from negative thoughts. It is today called ‘Mind-Body medicine’, which is basically about the impact of thought, feeling and belief, *within an individual*. Era 3 Medicine, since the 1990s, is based upon the ability of the mind to function *trans-personally or non-locally*. That is to say, the ability of the mind to function beyond the individual. This is supported by two bodies of evidence: Prayer, and Transpersonal imagery.

1) *Prayer*: It was noted that some people got well even though no medical treatment was given, except prayer. In a 1988 controlled study in San Francisco General Hospital (as well as in hundreds of similar studies), the group that was prayed for appeared to do much better than the group which received no prayer. 2) *Transpersonal imagery*: It has been showed that

people who hold positive images of a distant person, in a way that is caring, compassionate and prayer-like, can actually bring about physical changes in that distant person.

Prayer and ‘prayerfulness’ have as their central feature, empathy for the subject prayed for. They display *non-local manifestations of consciousness*. There is another aspect of mind-body-spirit medicine that depends on the physician’s empathy, *acting from within* the patient. Faith developed by the patient through the healing words of the physician, is its basis. Faith is a deep-seated feeling that leads to contentment and soothes the questioning mind. An empathetic approach by the physician helps the patient develop faith. Without faith the mind is active and restless. This has repercussions on the immune system, a fact that has been validated by several studies in the field of psychoneuroimmunology [6].

Taking the quantum view: Having made sense about the scientific basis for Era 2 and Era 3 components pertaining to conventional medicine, there is need to comprehend how exactly the three components act together to benefit the patient. Each of these Era 1, Era 2 and Era 3 components can be viewed as ‘quanta’ of different eras. The term ‘quantum’ refers to the smallest amount of a physical quantity that can change only in discrete amounts and not in a ‘continuum’ way.

For example, we often see a disease that is difficult to manage by conventional medicine but is successfully treated by the additional use of an alternative medicine, as in using Hypnotherapy in addition to drugs for the treatment of Bronchial Asthma [7]. Here we see ‘quanta’ of different ‘Eras’ (Era 1 and Era 2) acting simultaneously on the same patient, with each ‘quantum’ having its effect independent of what accompanies it. Medicine in real time operates in such a ‘quantum’ way, rather than in a ‘continuum’ way that excludes additional influences.

Conventional medicine is currently having Era 1 (body) as its main component, with the nursing profession mainly providing the Era 2 (mind-body) and Era 3 (mind-body-spirit) components. The various streams of alternative medicine possibly have an Era 1 component, which is more intuitive than scientific, while Era 2 (e.g., hypnotherapy) or Era 3 (e.g., faith healing) may be their main operative component.

Conclusion: For students of conventional medicine, some familiarity with the theory concerning the ‘body’ component of alternative systems will suffice, since the ‘mind’ and ‘spirit’ components are common to all. Understanding patient care in terms of the three components or ‘quanta’ gives a common platform to make sense of all systems of medicine. Finally, taking a ‘quantum view of medicine’ encourages a more purposeful and balanced use of all the three components by every practitioner of medicine.

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