



## Only You Can Do It, And You Cannot Do It Alone: A Review of the Literature on the Holistic Process of Healing

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### Abstract

A large body of literature describes the healing process used by the traditional medicines of the world, with a substantial contribution from the Hippocratic doctors about 2500 years ago.

Holistic healing-more accurately the holistic process of healing-has always three steps, independent on the healing system and the continent where it was developed:

1. Meet the feelings.
2. Understand what your problem is about and where it comes from (=what happened to you in the past).
3. Find the precise beliefs that make you sick, which came from the negative learning you had-and let go of them.

This simple formula for healing: "*Feel, understand, and let go*" seems to be a universal formula, reflecting the nature of man, as it is present in all native systems of healing.

The challenge of the doctor is to take a constructive role where he is involving his patient in the process of his own healing, and where he is giving the full responsibility for the healing to the patient. This is done by letting the patient understand that the project to be well again is his project-and his alone! The doctor first needs to step back from the role as an authority (the doctor role) to empower his patient. The he ideally reenters the process from below, as a wise friend and supporter. Because nobody can do this alone, you need a close person to help you meet your feeling, mind, and past. This is traditionally done by touch therapy. The integration process is then supported by talk therapy. Finally, is the letting go of negative beliefs supported by talks and exercises facilitating a renewing of the patient's philosophy of life.

**Keywords:** Traditional holistic healing; Mind-body medicine; Hippocrates; Asclepiad; Asclepion; Native American medicine man; Sangoma; Shaman; Aboriginal healer; Feelings; Understanding; Samic shamans; Eskimo spirit healers; Physicians role; Patient's responsibility; Philosophy of life; Happiness; Quality of life

### Introduction

The European doctor, working in the tradition of Hippocrates, got his authority from his expertise in healing. This tradition is well known from the around 57 well-preserved books dating back to Hippocrates time, and today collected in the Corpus Hippocraticum [1]. It is remarkable that while all continents have fine healing traditions, only the Greek medicine was written down in a great number of scientific books at an early age. Most medical traditions developed by the pre-modern cultures still exist today but oral. As we have experienced with the Native American medicine men there is a strong resistance against written documentation, making a substantial part of the existent ancient knowledge inaccessible for modern students- unless you yourself visit the native tribes.

This healing addresses traditionally all aspects of the human being; mind, body, and spirit, and therefore it is often called holistic healing (from Greek Holos, the whole). All problems and diseases are helped by the traditional doctors; physical illness of cause but also mental disorder, sexual problems, social dysfunction and working life problems as well. The physician understood all sides of human life, and helped with everything human, and therefore the physician was a respected and appreciated-even a beloved-member of the society.

### Literature Review

2500 years ago, the two basic tools of the Greek doctor in the Hippocratic tradition, the Asklepiasia, were talk therapy and touch

therapy [1]. The doctor talked and touched the body. This touch is called healing touch, as the intention of the touch is healing and examination in the same process. Today we call such an approach for mind-body-medicine. Still today exists a modern scientific form of the classical Hippocratic medicine, in the form of evidence-based mind-body medicine [2-12].

Holistic medicine was traditionally practiced in the patient's own home or in a holistic clinic or hospital. It was often combined with comfortable, recreational housing and a luxurious spa. We know from the ruins of the ancient hospitals that these hospitals often were very big and quite extravagantly equipped. A well-known example is the 10.000 m<sup>2</sup> big ruin of the Asklepiasion found on the island of Kos, where the famous doctor Hippocrates himself had his many patients and students. You might get an idea of the magnitude of this ancient 100-room temple-hospital-spa complex by studying the impressive stone staircase leading up to the hospital: it is about 10 m wide and 20 m long [13]. This place was a wonder!

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Hippocrates scientific principles of healing (which we have summarized in [14]) was during the next 2,5 millennia used by millions of traditional European doctors [13,14]. Around year 1900, when the new chemical medicine with its pills got more popular, there were hundred thousand physicians all over Europe practicing the holistic medicine, but already at Hippocrates times, the sources indicate that there were hundreds of holistic hospitals with thousands of physicians spread all over the civilized world.

The holistic process of healing has always three steps [14]:

1. Meet the feelings.
2. Understand that your problem is about and where it comes from (=what happened to you in the past).
3. Find the precise beliefs that make you sick, which came from the negative learning you had-and let go of them.

This simple formula for healing: "Feel, understand, and let go" seems to be a universal formula, as it seems to be present in all native systems of healing. It is used not only by the European healers but also by the native North American medicine men, the American shamans from the Amazon jungle as well as the African Sangomas, the Australian aboriginal rain forest healers, (The Asian 9 i.e., Thai) massage therapists, the Samic shamans, and the Eskimo spirit healers [15-19]. The literature on holistic healing from all parts of the world is rich and colorful, and often filled with symbolism and sacred rituals [20-28]. Often the local religion and the healing practice is mixed together in such a way that it is difficult to see what religious belief is and what is medical practice. You can say that you need to understand both, to understand the healing tradition of a culture.

The Greek doctors believed that in the end of the day, sickness came from being disobedient to the Gods. The countless Greek gods each expressed some fundamental law of the universe-and represented good ways to deal with the problems of everything from love and sexuality, art, family, work, social intercourse, justice, trade, conflicts, war etc. There were a God for everything important, and even Gods for smaller things like sailing, agriculture, wine production, house building etc. You can say the Greek Gods summarized the life wisdom accumulated in the Greek culture. Not living wisely and balanced was the true course of unhappiness, poverty and disease.

Interestingly, this is not far from what the modern science of quality of life tells us about health and disease where happiness seems to be the most important factor in staying healthy [29].

When we say that the Hippocratic tradition was overtaken by the chemical medicine, this is only halfway true. The family doctors most important role continues to be psychosomatic care, and continued instructions to the patients in happy, balanced and healthy living. All good medical schools have thorough courses for the coming doctor in holistic healing and psychosomatics. Emotional work and psychodynamic psychotherapy, which basically is the old talk therapy in a modern form, is also taught to medical students at good universities [30-33].

When a holistic psychosomatic doctor meets a patient, the eternal challenge is to take a constructive role where you are involving the patient in the process of healing and giving the responsibility to the patient [2-12]. This is done by letting the patient understand that the project to be well again is his or her project-and his or hers ALONE! That is very strange indeed, that the doctor first needs to step back from the role as a doctor, to empower the patient. But this is how it is always

done. *"You are sick, because of the way you see things and the way you live. I cannot change that. Only you can do that!" "But what am I to do?" will the patient ask. "You need to find out why you are sick. Then you will also see what you have to change to heal"*.

The doctor first gives the patient the job to find out what the problem is. That is not an easy task. The patient cannot do it alone. The doctor is there to help. This is help to self-help. This is loving service, given in the humblest way. It is not that the good doctor would not know what the problem is, but the patient has no value out of what another person knows. The patient needs to understand it him- or herself. As understanding grows, many things in life need to change, and many old untrue beliefs and ideas must go. That is what the holistic doctors continued service support the patient in.

For a well-trained and experienced holistic doctor, it is normally easy to see why a patient is sick. Maybe you cannot understand the specific mechanism that creates a disease, but the experience of a mind with unsound beliefs giving a constant pressure to a fragile human body is there always. Therefore it is quite easy for a good doctor to guide the patient towards a more constructive philosophy of life and a healthier and happier way of living, often giving the effect of healing even to serious problems and diseases in a few months' time.

#### What can be cured with holistic medicine?

According to recent research in psychosomatics-almost everything [2-12], heart diseases, cancer, most mental diseases, allergies, chronic pains, sexual problems etc., can be cured [34-39], they are all on the list that seems effectively and safely cured with holistic medicine [40-83]. For a comprehensive text on the matter, we refer to our textbooks in evidence-based holistic mind-body medicine and our analysis in effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of mind-body medicine [2-12,84-97].

#### Discussion and Conclusion

What is most important to understand when it comes to holistic healing is that the physical, mental, existential, or sexual problem the patient is suffering from are caused by oppressed emotions. These emotions are bound to the body, making bodywork as essential as talk therapy, as the old Greek doctors so well knew. Only when the feelings hidden in the body are met, can the problems be understood, and only when there is a deep and thorough understanding, can there be healing and change.

Almost everything can be healed, but only if the patient is able and willing to take responsibility for his or her own process of healing. The doctor can help, but in the end of the day it must be the patient who does the work. We live in a society of consumers who want easy solutions that does not involve any responsibility for one's own life; therefore pharmaceutical drugs and surgical procedures have become popular with both patients and doctors, but often with modest results. Fortunately, the old knowledge of healing is preserved and appreciated by most general practitioners, and by many specialized doctors.

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