

A Holistic View of Mental Health

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There has been a lot written about a holistic connection to physical health. Written material on the holistic connection between mental illness and mental health is not readily available. However, holistic information applies and includes a view of mental illness and mental health.

"Holistic" means body, mind and spirit connections. Traditional mental health services do not consider this view. Historically, they do not consider cure or recovery either. Nevertheless, a holistic view is important as an alternative because it contributes to a person's healing.

This view blends eastern and western philosophies to help us understand mental illness and mental health. Western philosophy's belief, based on objective knowledge, is that genetics, biology, and/or environment cause mental illness, and that mental illness is incurable. However, eastern philosophy, based on subjective experience, regards mind, body and spirit connections not as separate but parts of the whole. A holistic view recognizes that healing is possible.

David McMillin, a mental health professional in Virginia Beach, Virginia, has studied this view and applies it in his work. David states, "Spirit is the life (life force), mind is the builder, and the physical is the result." He says the individual consists of mind, body and spirit.

Mr. McMillin further states, "The psyche or soul connects at definite anatomical centers in the physical body. For example, mind connects the physical body through the nervous system. The spiritual connections in the physical body are primarily through the glandular system, particularly the endocrine glands." Mr. McMillin further explains, "Another way of thinking about the soul is that it is the individual aspect of spirit. Conversely, spirit is the universal aspect of soul. Soul (psyche) is the part of us that grows and develops. Spirit is the universal creative life force of the soul's development."

It is the spiritual force through which we have the ability to work, to affect change, to perform over a period of time and space in a materialistic world. Spirit is the force behind our lives. Spirit is a universal principle of life. Spirit is dynamic energy — the energy we bring to our lives that gives them a spark.

By blending eastern/western philosophies, we understand that illness happens when these holistic connections become disrupted through heredity or genetics, injury or trauma, meditation practices, deep study of religious beliefs or scripture for enlightenment, not using your energy constructively, environment, or the psyche (soul) of one person influencing the psyche (soul) of another. Disorder or illness occurs when the holistic connections are out of balance. Imbalances are responsible for physical and psychological illnesses. In the holistic view, mental illness has its origin when the spiritual and/or physical become imbalanced. However, order is inherent in disorder, making a return to health possible.

Chaplain Anton T. Boison, in his book *The Exploration of the Inner World* (1936), believed that "many problems of insanity are religious (spiritual) rather than medical problems, and that they cannot be successfully treated until they are so recognized. Mental disorders are not evils but problem solving experiences." He sees mental illness as an individual's unhappy solution to life's problems. (Note, Chaplain Boison himself was diagnosed with mental illness.)

Chaplain Boison also said that "our life situations present efforts at growth that create conflicts while striving to achieve better than where we are. A serious sense of inner disharmony and isolation from other people is the catalyst to our unhappy solutions. The experience for many is a

make or break one." Furthermore, Mr. McMillin emphasizes that "sometimes the physical body (especially the nervous and glandular systems) are not able to handle the stress of life's challenges and problems. Mental illness is one of the possible outcomes when the mental and spiritual connections in the body become overwhelmed by life's distressing experiences."

In a physical sense, food provides the nutrients used for energy. The endocrine system utilizes chemical messengers to coordinate various activities of the body parts. There is a certain amount of overlap with the nervous system, which utilizes neurotransmitter substances creating excitability or inhibition causing neurons to either fire or not. Together these provide the necessary chemicals that energize our spiritual lives. Spirit is energy fueled by the endocrine system. It is the spiritual force by which we live.

Mind can be a destroyer as well as a builder. The operations of the mind influenced by information received through the nervous system by way of the senses — touch, taste, sight, hearing, and smell — forms thoughts interpreted into beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. These can be both negative and positive based on experience. They have a profound effect on us holistically, whether they are conscious or not. Together they can make us feel happy or sad, angry or peaceful, sick or healthy. Mental and physical health manifests by thinking, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. Dr. Kidd of the Genetics Department at Yale University agrees that the mind is extraordinary. He says research in genetics has proven that "the brain is phenomenal and can be retrained to overcome genetic defects."

Illness means mind, body, and spirit function without the awareness of the other. For optimum health in a holistic view the mind, body, and spirit function harmoniously through self-knowledge brought into balance by the will. A holistic view means the individual begins the process of self-knowledge, and by the will brings these connections into balance to achieve mental and physical health. The two cannot be separated.

When people make holistic connections, achieving mental health goes beyond recovery or cure; it begins in the inner self and heals. This healing process transforms individuals and their lives as they become their new, healthy selves — physically, mentally, and spiritually. Going through the experiences and making the connections change lives for the better if it happens under the right circumstances. The physical result is that as people mature into responsible living brought into balance by the will, they grow into their true holistic selves.© (1995)