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12 **Hope: A Panacea Unrecognized**

By Alphonsus Obayuwana

Since the dawn of humanity, mankind has struggled hard to stay healthy. Today, even with the advantage of advanced medical sciences, the answers to mankind's health problems still remain elusive.

In a stress-saturated society such as we live in, only anticipatory health care holds the greatest promise of helping the greatest number of people. In attempting to secure optimum health for mankind therefore, it is necessary to take into account the fact that all issues affecting mankind always influence mankind's state of health.

The feeling of *HOPELESSNESS* has been determined to contribute to the onset of illnesses, slowdown recovery and induce passivity during ill-health. Thus, at every available opportunity, all possible efforts should be made to constantly reinforce and nurture that important health-related component of the human constitution which is called *Hope*.

Cuyler said:

Hope is the flower of desire. . . . It administers consolation in distress— quickens all our pursuits and communicates to the mind the pleasure of anticipation. There is no happiness which hope can not promise, no difficulty which it can not mitigate. It is the health of the sick, the freedom of the captive, the rest of the toiler.

I. Old writings like "*Mens Sana in Corpora Sana*" show that the Ancient's concept of health very well recognized both the somatic and psychic components of human functioning. It is only recently, however, that it seems to dawn upon many people in the health professions of the modern society that health is not

the mere absence of disease and/or infirmity but a state of optimal physical, mental and social well-being.

The history of mankind and medicine reveals, in many instances, the ironic risks and sometimes actual loss of human lives in the attempt to secure optimum health. Witchcraft, religion and science have been called upon by various cultural ages to provide opinions concerning how mankind can stay healthy, prevent illness, remove disease, or restore the body to a previous state of health.

Today, even with the superior and advanced medical sciences, the answers to society's health problems still elude us. Archeology and paleopathology have revealed evidences of ochronosis, tuberculosis, tumor of the bones, malnutrition (rickets, obesity), arteriosclerosis, infection (osteomyelitis) and fractures in prehistoric man. This means, that many of the diseases found in modern society are not new. And the cure of these old/new maladies do not always require sophisticated, totally new, and highly scientific medical technology. Of course, *Sine dubio*, new and better methods of scientific diagnosis and treatment, will always remain invaluable in the prevention, early detection and treatment of many diseases. However, the actual promotion of health or the everyday maintenance of optimal human functioning requires neither surgery nor psychoanalysis. It simply needs the constant reinforcement and nurturing of that important health-related component of the human constitution— *Hope*.

Hope is the feeling that what is desired is also possible or that events may turn out for the best. And while *Hope*, as in the second definition, reveals a tinge of religious flavor, the first definition merely recognizes the possibility of a desired outcome. Nevertheless, *Hope* in either definition fulfills the same function of

promising a chance of favorable outcome. For many persons, *Hope* develops as an extension of a deep faith in a deity. To the non-religious, it comes largely from the realization that chance or probability is random, but reliable and dependable enough to be a fair phenomenon.

It is rather significant that neither Freud, Piaget nor Erikson attempted in their major works to ascribe the acquisition of *Hope* to any particular stage of human development. This could suggest a common realization by these exhaustive writers that *Hope* is a highly fluid attribute of mankind, which can be mobilized and shaped to maximize any stage of human development and fit all circumstances.

Among the many thinkers who have recognized the overpowering influence of *Hope* upon health is the philosophical poet and physician, Joseph MacDuff, who wrote:

. . . without hope, there is neither a chance nor reason for health . . .

In dealing with the optimum health of the society and how to maximize the functioning of all its members, stress as a nuisance can not be ignored. As defined by the biologist, stress is any stimulus that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism. Dr. Hans Selye emphasized that any demand upon a living system is indeed a stress. It is apparent, therefore, that many situations in the ordinary day-to-day function of human beings result in stress. In the consideration of the effects of stress upon health, it is generally immaterial whether the demand (agent or situation) is pleasant or unpleasant. (The Maryland State Lottery Commission recently had an internist on stand-by before announcing the million-dollar winning number to ticket-holders.)

The major factors that determine the extent of damage by stress are intensity

and duration. When stress of sufficient intensity and lingering duration constantly provokes the human body, a reduced ability to function optimally can and will occur.

Hippocrates, it is generally believed, was the first scientific physician who actively began the attempt to separate medicine from religion by differentiating the roles of the doctor and the priest. In this separation of religion from science, all attributes of the human culture and behavior generally associated with religion—faith, hope and prayer—became ignored by medicine. Hope, however, continued to serve as the common but unrecognized basis of all healing processes.

The amazing therapeutic results of placebos, the enigma of spontaneous recovery, the very apparently healthy religious and cultural groups which use no drugs at all, and the enhanced effects of many therapeutic drugs when administered by a trusted physician or a nurse, are only a few evidences of the importance of Hope in the process of healing.

In almost every culture, despair, guilt and grief are generally thought to be associated with ill-health or death but Hope, confidence, and contentment are regarded as conducive to health. Many investigators of various expertise and specializations who have chosen the hard tasks of finding out why people fall ill or die, do agree that a common psychological state precedes the onset of all illnesses. This state which Dr. George Engel and his colleagues call "giving-up-given-up complex" is known to significantly influence the capacity to cope with pathogenic factors.

The most characteristic feature of this complex is a sense of psychological impotence or *HOPELESSNESS*—a feeling that one is unable to cope with changes in the environment and that nothing

available can be of use or effective. During such a state of intensive despair, the biological economy of the body is altered and the resulting physiological conditions contribute to the emergence of ill-health.

Thus, it can be seen that when the environment of the individual is saturated with stress, and *Hope* is absent, ill-health is the ultimate and inevitable result. This, in fact, describes and explains the state of health of the modern society.

II. The health professionals should begin to help even before crises occur by reaching the patients before disease. Physicians and nurses should realize that they can no longer shy away and remain passive to political, civic and spiritual issues, because stress resulting from the mismanagement of these aspects of the society soon influence the health of individuals in the community.

A strike by local bus drivers, cases of female molestations or rape and reports of police brutality should be as much a concern to the health professionals as is a report of incidences of swine flu or rabies in the community.

It is not only ironic but lamentable that the community physicians offer no opinions about gun control legislation, yet the victims of gun fights and snipers soon end up on the table in the already too crowded emergency room. It is apparent, if human functioning is to be enhanced, health care will have to become a 24-hour watch over the total welfare of mankind.

In addition to these challenges and broad suggestions, I am recommending a special method of anticipatory health care which I call "*Hope Therapy*." This therapy consists of a collection of positive and health fostering gestures on the part of the health professional (physician, nurse, social worker, counseling

psychologist, etc.) on any occasion that allows the professional to assume a meaningful role. The therapy includes a relaxed but thorough interview which aids both participants in the determination and discussion of all stressful conditions in the life of the patient. 13

Also, the hopes and desires of the individual are verbally and non-verbally positively reinforced. Reasonable and practical suggestions are offered and all needed referrals to the appropriate agencies are initiated instantly. Understanding and caring are made readily evident to the individual and a sincere willingness to help in the future is communicated.

Primarily, this therapy stimulates the Hope of the individual, reduces anxiety, and increases his ability to cope with stress.

III. Dr. Martin E. Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania has described what he calls "*learned helplessness*," a phenomenon produced in dogs, rats and humans who are confronted with seemingly uncontrollable events. In this poignant example, emphasizing the influence of Hope on health-promoting attitudes, it was revealed that after exposing animal or human subjects to a series of inescapable electric shocks, most chose to remain passive and did not take advantage of the possibility to avoid the shocks by moving their bodies.

This and similar findings demand that every health professional must learn to promote recovery by countering despair because hope, that change is possible, must precede change. In diagnosis and treatment, responsible care of the patient as a person is very important because interpersonal relationships profoundly affect how the patient feels, thinks, behaves and responds to the care. □

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