

From Henry's Desk by Henry Holland

The Benefits of Western Traditional Medicine

Post-Polio Syndrome (PPS) is a chronic, often progressively debilitating neuromuscular condition that most survivors of paralytic and bulbar polio are experiencing in their later adult years. No precise etiology for PPS has been found; although many theories seem plausible. Many treatment recommendations have been made over the years. These treatments involve conventional medical model approaches and numerous alternative treatments. I have personally heard lectures, seen demonstrations and witnessed some of the alternative treatments. Examples would be magnets, chiropractor, therapeutic massage, acupuncture, the Feldenkrais method, holistic supplements, vitamin therapy, yoga, healing touch, chelation, dream analysis and spiritual approaches. This article is not intended to be critical of any of these approaches except to say that most of them are not verifiable by the scientific method. Modern western traditional medicine is based on the scientific method. Any respected medical or surgical journal will reveal the scientific method in its articles.

The New England Journal of Medicine is one of the most highly respected medical journals in the world. It is published weekly and began in 1812. All original research and clinical research articles in this journal follow the scientific method with a written background on reasons for the particular research or study, methods utilized in the study, which often include double blind studies, the results of the study, and finally the conclusions reached as a result of the study. Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin used this very approach in their research on the development of an effective polio vaccine. A massive double blind study was done with the Salk vaccine on school children in the United States from mid 1954 to April 1955. What did "double blind" mean in this study? It meant that some of the children got the real Salk vaccine and some got a placebo, but the folks who gave and the children who received the vaccine did not know which was which. After the time of the study was over, it was found that the children who really received the Salk vaccine had a much greater protection against polio than those who received placebo. Only those who set up the study were aware of who got what. Thus, the givers of the vaccine or placebo and the children receiving the same were both "blind" as to the real contents of each syringe. This method greatly added to the objectivity of the study and made it more likely that other researchers could repeat it and get the same results. Albert Sabin did the same thing except he used Russian children to conduct his clinical studies. The scientific method is the backbone or the basis of western traditional medicine. This method is used in every accredited medical/research/teaching center in the United States as well as used by the pharmaceutical industry. The Federal Food and Drug Administration attempts to keep us safe by the same approach.

How has this approach benefited the world? Disease prevention is a major example. The scientific method has provided the world population with numerous effective

vaccines. Many of you are aware of this if you have traveled to Africa, Asia, and other continents. Our children are protected from many childhood contagious diseases because of vaccines. The scientific method has brought about many effective pharmaceutical treatments and curative surgical procedures. The skills and instruments to aid in making a correct diagnosis have progressed immensely in terms of technology. Magnetic resonance imaging is a wonderful tool for the early diagnosis of some potentially terrible disorders.

Technological advances are happening almost every day. No physician is 100% correct in making a diagnosis and recommending a treatment, but the rational scientific approach has helped us more than any other approach. I challenge the reader to name any known disease entity that has been uncovered, diagnosed, and successfully treated as a result of any other method than the scientific method.

How does the placebo effect influence the effectiveness of various therapies? What is the placebo effect? The Wikipedia Internet Encyclopedia defines placebo as follows:

"A placebo is a substance or procedure a patient accepts as medicine or therapy, but which has no verifiable therapeutic activity. The placebo effect (or placebo response) is a therapeutic effect following administration of a placebo, or more generally: is the psychosocial effect of medical treatment. Effective on 30% of humans and only for some conditions, it is also known as the non-specific effect or subject-expectancy effect."

Thus, one could question whether the reported or experienced therapeutic effect of alternative therapies may be largely due to the placebo effect. In double blind drug studies a drug can be evaluated for its therapeutic effect if it has a positive effect beyond the effect of placebo (beyond 30%). In therapies or treatments that are not verified by the scientific method, the placebo effect may be quite significant or it may be less significant. Particularly in chronic medical conditions such as fibromyalgia, degenerative arthritis, tension headache and PPS, the placebo effect may be more significant. Surgical procedures are also judged more effective only if they result in a better result with less risk than previously accepted surgical treatments.

Western physicians are trained by this method to this day. Every college student who would like to go to medical school must do well in the premedical required courses, do well on the standardized Medical College Admission Test (MedCAT), and get accepted to at least one accredited medical school. Then this same student must be highly motivated, energetic and intelligent enough to learn an immense amount of subject matter in the first two years of medical school. During the last two years this student must learn an equally difficult amount of clinical material by means of lectures by practitioners, making hospital rounds, and serving on clinical rotations in the hospital or community facilities. Then after all of this the testing never seems to end. There is the state board of medicine exam, the national board of medicine exam, the specialty board

exam and endless continuing education requirements in order to maintain one's license. The challenge is to never become complacent, but to continue to learn more.

I for one believe that the traditional western approach to the study and practice of medicine in utilizing the process of research, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease has and will continue to be the leader in the progress toward a healthy life for more and more people throughout the world. Admittedly there is much to fix in the delivery of health care to everyone, but the scientific methods of the past continue to be effective.