



My perspective on Holistic integrative medicine

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Specialization has greatly promoted the development and progress of medicine; however, it has given rise to its own intractable problems. Because of specialization, subjects are divided and then subdivided, fragmenting our medical knowledge. In this context, some measure of integration is necessary. Considering the human body as a whole, holistic integrative medicine (HIM) integrates the most advanced theoretical knowledge with the best clinical practices and experiences from various medical disciplines, and it corrects and restructures this knowledge in light of social, environmental, and psychological factors. HIM aims to frame a new medical system that is more in line with human health and disease treatment^[1-2]. Integrative medicine uses a methodology that focuses on both the disease and the patient. Proceeding from a holistic, integrated, and medical viewpoint, it looks at the human being as a whole and places patients in a larger context, considering natural, social, psychological, and other factors. By converting data and evidence obtained from medical research back into original facts, by transforming knowledge and consensus

gained from clinical practice into experience, and by consolidating techniques and arts discerned from clinical explorations into medical approaches, HIM takes shape through these repeated practices at the levels of facts, experiences, and medical approaches^[3-4].

Regarding holistic conception, I have previously proposed the SPC Healthcare theory^[5]. In this theory, S refers to spatial healthcare. An individual is not only a whole entity in himself/herself but also an integral part of the environment and society. We are all shaped by our environment and society, and we must abide by the laws of the universe. P refers to people-oriented healthcare. Regarding holistic integration, an individual comprises the following three components: material, energy, and information. Material is of fundamental importance, whereas energy and information embody the essence of life. Currently, we are good at dissecting the human body into organs, sectioning organs into cells under microscopes, and dicing cells into molecules using molecular knives. However, we must not remain confined within the micro-world or must not immerse ourselves in molecular-level research, believing this to be the key to success. Our understanding of microscopic and molecular features is useful only when we return to the macro level. The advancement of conventional physiology

and pathology currently faces a difficult future. Increasingly less numbers of students are studying gross anatomy, and general internal medicine and general surgery departments are disappearing from hospitals. We are losing the spirit of people-oriented medicine, and relationships between doctors and patients are becoming more distant. In the context of such a medical system, it is imperative to make improvements. C refers to temporal chrono-healthcare. Changes occur with time, and this rule applies to all living beings. Sunflowers turn to face the sun, and mimosas bloom at night and close during the day. Additionally, willows, whether in Xi'an or Beijing, all sprout in spring. Moreover, all deep-sea fish swim to the Yangtze River estuary on the same days to lay their eggs. Similarly, patients respond to anticarcinogens sometimes, rather than always, because of the inherent differences in their cell cycles.

Regarding integrative conception, certain statements often made by doctors and patients need to be corrected. Doctors say that diseases must be treated, and patients say that diseases are cured by treatment. These statements are incorrect or at least incomplete. Approximately one-third of patients recover without any treatment and another one-third have a poor prognosis regardless of the treatment. This leaves only one-third who recover following a proper treatment. Among those who recover without any treatment, their self-healing ability or the self-limiting nature of the disease is responsible for recovery. Incurable diseases are considered fatal, whereas diseases that can be treated are considered curable, and doctors come into play for such diseases. Different doctors use different approaches according to their knowledge and training. With increasingly subdivided medical fields and more specialized doctors, diseases that used to be self-limiting have become incurable. These problems and their possible solutions deserve our highest attention. In the past, patients were informed of the diagnosis during clinic

visits, whereas now, they are informed about the diseases that do not fit their clinical condition. The process of integration includes selecting the right numbers, putting plus signs in the right places, and determining the sum. Serial integration refers to the process of connecting related variables in a line, and parallel integration refers to combining the lines to build a plane. Crosslinked integration structures the planes to form a three-dimensional object. Serial integration is based on logical thinking, and scientific methods suffice for this. However, parallel integration requires abstract thinking, and scientific methods are inadequate for this. Crosslinked integration, being of the highest level, calls for imaginative thinking^[3].

Regarding medical conception, the existing scientific or biomedical perspective is not as inclusive as it should be in actual practice. Medicine is not fully reducible to science, as it is more than merely science. It involves other subjects of the same or even greater importance than science, such as psychology, anthropology, and philosophy^[6]. Every discipline associated with our physical or mental state as human beings should be considered a part of medicine. There is a famous saying by Hippocrates, the father of medicine: "The doctor has three magic weapons, the first is the language, the second is a drug, the third is the scalpel." Here language is not reducible to science. Osler said, "Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability." Life, after all, has many probabilities, but no certainties. Thus, we should fully utilize scientific theories to promote the development of medicine but should not be restrained by it; we should leverage scientific methods to conduct medical research but should not let this produce misunderstandings; we should rely on scientific data to facilitate the process of diagnosis but not to replace doctors; and we should establish guidelines based on scientific consensus, but should never mistake consensus for truth^[6].

I often get questions about the similarities

and differences between HIM and other medical approaches. My answer is that I believe translational medicine is the road, whereas evidence-based medicine and precision medicine are the curbstones and guideposts. Although roads, curbstones, and guideposts are very important, they are not enough to reach the destination. We also need a fully functioning car with a steering wheel, tires, an engine, and a fuel tank, as well as an excellent driver, to reach our destination; HIM represents these things^[7].

Roy Porter, a historian at the University of Cambridge, said, "Never have people in the West lived so long, or been so healthy, and never have medical achievements been so great. Yet, paradoxically, rarely has medicine drawn such intense doubts and disapproval as today"^[8]. I believe that this is because we want an even longer life expectancy and healthier lives, which are unattainable with our existing medical systems and our current medical knowledge and technologies. Recently, iatrogenic factors have become the third leading cause for overall mortality in American hospitals^[9]. Should the doctors or medical systems be blamed for this statistic?

All doctors are doing their best within the limitations imposed by current scientific approaches and their own knowledge, but concerted efforts do not necessarily result in a positive or optimal treatment for patients. It may sometimes even lead to harmful results. What should we

do? By resorting to HIM, we should improve our conceptions, education, and practices. Medicine does not separate. Doctors and pharmacists must work closely together to promote the all-round development of medicine. Holistic integrative pharmacy plays an important role in the holistic integrative medicine system.

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