Advanced 3
Unit 5 Reading
Presented by Mohammad Rajabpur

The Power of Nothing

A

Want to devise a new form of alternative medicine? No problem. Here's the recipe. Be warm, sympathetic, reassuring, and enthusiastic. Your treatment should involve physical contact, and each session with your patients should last at least half an hour. Encourage your patients to take an active part in their treatment and understand how their disorders relate to the rest of their lives. Tell them that their own bodies possess the true power to heal. Make them pay you out of their own pockets. Describe your treatment in familiar words, but embroidered with a hint of mysticism: energy fields, energy flows, energy blocks, meridians, forces, auras, rhythms, and the like. Refer to the knowledge of an earlier age: wisdom carelessly swept aside by the rise of blind, mechanistic science.

devise verb [T] /dɪˈvaɪz/ to invent a plan, system, object, etc., usually using your intelligence or imagination:

He's good at devising language games that you can play with students in class.

The cartoon characters Snoopy and Charlie Brown were devised by Charles M. Schultz.

aura noun [C] /ˈɔːr.ə/ a feeling or character that a person or place seems to have:

The woods have an aura of mystery.

There's an aura of sadness about him.

embroider verb [I or T] /ɪmˈbrɔɪ.dɚ/ to decorate cloth or clothing with patterns or pictures consisting of stitches that are sewn directly onto the material:

I am embroidering this picture for my mother.

embroider = to make a story more entertaining by adding imaginary details to it:

Naturally, I embroidered the tale a little to make it more interesting.

mysticism noun [U] /ˈmɪs.tə.sɪ.zəm/ = the belief that there is hidden meaning in life or that each human being can unite with God

B

Oh, come off it, you're saying. Something invented off the top of your head couldn't possibly work, could it? Well yes, it could—and often well enough to earn you a living. A good living if you are sufficiently convincing, or, better still, really believe in your therapy. Many illnesses get better on their own, so if you are lucky and administer your treatment at just the right time, you'll get the credit. But that's only part of it. Some of the improvement really would be down to you. Your healing power would be the outcome of a paradoxical force that conventional medicine recognizes but remains oddly ambivalent about: the placebo effect.

ambivalent adjective /æmˈbɪv.ə.lənt/ having two opposing feelings at the same time, or being uncertain about how you feel:

I felt very ambivalent about leaving home.
He has fairly ambivalent feelings towards his father.
an ambivalent attitude to exercise

placebo noun [C] /pləˈsiː.boʊ/ (plural placebos) a substance given to someone who is told that it is a particular medicine, either to make that person feel as if they are getting better or to compare the effect of the particular medicine when given to others:

She was only given a placebo, but she claimed she got better - that's the placebo effect.

C

Placebos are treatments that have no direct effect on the body, yet still work because the patient has faith in their power to heal. Most often the term refers to a dummy pill, but it applies just as much to any device or procedure, from a sticking plaster to a crystal to an operation. The existence of the placebo effect implies that even quackery may confer real benefits, which is why any mention of placebo is a touchy subject for many practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine, who are likely to regard it as tantamount to a charge of charlatanism. In fact, the placebo effect is a powerful part of all medical care, orthodox or otherwise, though its role is often neglected and misunderstood.

term noun = a word or expression used in relation to a particular subject, often to describe something official or technical:

"Without let or hindrance" is a legal term that means "freely".

quackery noun [U] (disapproving) /ˈkwæk.ə.i/ = medical methods that do not work and are only intended to make money

tantamount adjective (formal) /ˈtæn.ʈə.maʊnt/ tantamount to something
being almost the same or having the same effect as something, usually something bad:

Her refusal to answer was tantamount to an admission of guilt.

charlatan noun [C] disapproving /ˈʃɑːr.lə.ʈən/ = a person who pretends to have skills or knowledge that they do not have, especially in medicine

charlatanism = the practice of being a charlatan

orthodox adjective /ˈɔːr.θə.dɑːks/ = (of beliefs, ideas, or activities) considered traditional, normal, and acceptable by most people:

orthodox treatment/methods
orthodox views/opinions
We would prefer a more orthodox approach/solution to the problem.

D

At one level, it should come as no surprise that our state of mind can influence our physiology: anger opens the superficial blood vessels of the face; sadness pumps the tear glands. But exactly how placebos work their medical magic is still largely unknown. Most of the scant research done so far has focused on the control of pain because it's one of the commonest complaints and lends itself to experimental study. Here, attention has turned to the endorphins, morphine-like neurochemicals known to help control pain.

physiology noun [U] US /ˌfɪz.iˈɑː.lə.dʒi/ = (the scientific study of) the way in which the bodies of living things work

scant adjective [before noun] /skænt/ = very little and not enough:

He pays scant attention to the needs of his children.

scant regard for the truth

E

That case has been strengthened by the recent work of Fabrizio Benedetti of the University of Turin, who showed that the placebo effect can be abolished by a drug, naloxone, which blocks the effects of endorphins. Benedetti induced pain in human volunteers by inflating a blood-pressure cuff on the forearm. He did this several times a day for several days, using morphine each time to control the pain. On the final day, without saying anything, he replaced the morphine with a saline solution. This still relieved the subjects' pain: a placebo effect. But when he added naloxone to the saline, the pain relief disappeared. Here was direct proof that placebo analgesia is mediated, at least in part, by these natural opiates. Still, no one knows how belief triggers endorphin release, or why most people can't achieve placebo pain relief simply by willing it.

naloxone noun [U] MEDICAL specialized /nəˈlɑːk.soʊn/ a drug used to reduce or remove the effects of taking too much of an opioid drug (= morphine or a drug that resembles morphine)

saline noun [U] CHEMISTRY, MEDICAL specialized UK /ˈseɪ.laɪn/ US /ˈseɪ.liːn/ = a liquid mixture of salt and pure water, used to kill bacteria or to replace liquid lost from the body:

a saline drip

analgesia noun [U] UK /ˌæn.əlˈdʒiː.zi.ə/ US /ˌæn.əlˈdʒiː.zi.ə/
an inability to feel pain:

Patients were monitored for postoperative analgesia.
It could not have been predicted that the substance would produce analgesia.

drugs that stop you from feeling pain:

Addiction to analgesia is a common problem.
We discussed why and how analgesia should be given in childbirth.

opiate noun [C] UK /ˈəʊ.pi.ət/ US /ˈoʊ.pi.ət/ = a drug that contains opium, especially one that causes sleep

F

Though scientists don't know exactly how placebos work, they have accumulated a fair bit of knowledge about how to trigger the effect. A London rheumatologist found, for example, that red dummy capsules made more effective painkillers than blue, green, or yellow ones. Research on American students revealed that blue pills make better sedatives than pink, a color more suitable for stimulants. Even branding can make a difference: if Aspro or Tylenol are what you like to take for a headache, their chemically identical generic equivalents may be less effective.

dummy noun [C] (NOT REAL) = something that is not real and is used for practice or to deceive:

The device is not a real bomb but a dummy.

sedative noun [C] /ˈsed.ə.ţɪv/ = a drug used to calm a person or animal or to make them sleep

G

It matters, too, how the treatment is delivered. "Physicians who adopt a warm, friendly, and reassuring bedside manner," reports Edzard Ernst, professor of Complementary and Alternative Medicine at Exeter University, "are more effective than those whose consultations are formal and do not offer reassurance." Warm, friendly, and reassuring are also alternative medicine's strong suits, of course. Many of the ingredients of that opening recipe—the generous swathes of time, the strong hints of supernormal healing power—are just the kind of thing likely to impress patients. It's hardly surprising, then, that aromatherapists, acupuncturists, herbalists, etc. seem to be good at mobilizing the placebo effect.

swathe noun (also swath) UK /sweɪð/ US /swɑθ/ [S] literary

a large part of something that includes several different things:

These people represent a broad/wide swathe of public opinion.

aromatherapy noun [U] UK /əˌrəʊ.məˈθer.ə.pi/ US /əˌroʊ.məˈθer.ə.pi/

the treatment of worry or nervousness, or medical conditions that are not serious, by rubbing pleasant-smelling natural substances into the skin or breathing in their smell:

aromatherapy massage

aromatherapy oils

acupuncture noun [U] UK /ˈæk.jə.pʌŋk.tʃər/ US /ˈæk.jə.pʌŋk.tʃɚ/
a treatment for pain or illness in which thin needles are positioned just under the surface of the skin at special points around the body:
Acupuncture originated in China.

herbalist noun [C] UK /ˈhɜː.bəl.ɪst/ US /ˈɝː.bəl.ɪst/ = a person who grows or sells herbs for use as medicine

H
The question is whether alternative medicine could be integrated into conventional medicine, as some would like, without losing much of its power. But for much of alternative medicine—especially techniques in which the placebo effect accounts for most or perhaps all the benefit—integration might well be counterproductive. After all, the value of alternative medicine depends partly on its unorthodoxy. "One intuitively feels that something exotic has a stronger placebo effect than something bog-standard. And some complementary therapists are very exotic," says Ernst.

account for = explain

bog-standard adjective UK informal disapproving UK /ˌbɒgˈstæn.dəd/ US /ˌbɑːgˈstæn.dɚd/
completely ordinary, without anything special added:
My last car was just a bog-standard model.

I
Integration faces other obstacles, too. Doctors would face serious ethical dilemmas in recommending what they know to be placebo treatments to their patients. And complementary practitioners would likely be disparaged by their conventional counterparts, as they often are today. Integrated medicine "would have about as much validity as a hybrid of astronomy and astrology," wrote anesthetist Neville Goodman in the April newsletter of Health Watch.

disparage verb [T] UK /dɪˈspær.ɪdʒ/ US /dɪˈsper.ɪdʒ/ to criticize someone or something in a way that shows you do not respect or value him, her, or it:

The actor's work for charity has recently been disparaged in the press as an attempt to get publicity.

validity noun [U] UK /vəˈlɪd.ə.ti/ US /vəˈlɪd.ə.t̬i/ = the quality of being based on truth or reason, or of being able to be accepted:

This research seems to give/lend some validity to the theory that the drug might cause cancer.
Not for one moment did he doubt the validity of those ideas.

J

Some would also point out that a professor of surgery with a confident manner, an expensive suit, and an international reputation who sees you privately and guarantees to solve your problem with a costly operation is still unrivaled as a source of placebo power. But most doctors are beaten hands down by countless alternative practitioners who might not know a lymphocyte from a lump of cheese. What they do know is how to make you feel better. And that's a big part of the battle.

lymphocyte noun [C] BIOLOGYspecialized UK /ˈlim.fə.saɪt/ US /ˈlim.fə.saɪt/
a type of white blood cell involved in fighting disease and infection in the body, some of which produce antibodies (= proteins that attack and kill harmful bacteria)

Full Text:

The Power of Nothing

A

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final day, without saying anything, he replaced the morphine with a saline solution. This still relieved the subjects' pain: a placebo effect. But when he added naloxone to the saline, the pain relief disappeared. Here was direct proof that placebo analgesia is mediated, at least in part, by these natural opiates. Still, no one knows how belief triggers endorphin release, or why most people can't achieve placebo pain relief simply by willing it.

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Some would also point out that a professor of surgery with a confident manner, an expensive suit, and an international reputation who sees you privately and guarantees to solve your problem with a costly operation is still unrivaled as a source of placebo power. But most doctors are beaten hands down by countless alternative practitioners who might not know a lymphocyte from a lump of cheese. What they do know is how to make you feel better. And that's a big part of the battle.

The Text in Simple English:

A

Do you want to make a new kind of healing method? It’s easy. Just follow these steps. Be kind, understanding, comforting, and excited. Your healing method should touch your patients, and each time you see them should be at least 30 minutes long. Make your patients do something in their healing process and help them see how their problems are connected to their lives. Tell them that they can heal themselves with their own bodies. Make them pay you with their own money. Use words that they know, but add some mystery to them: things like energy, flow, block, line, force, light, beat, and so on. Use the old wisdom that was forgotten when people started to trust only science.

B

You might think that a treatment you made up can’t work, right? But it can—and sometimes it can work so well that you can make money from it. Especially if you are good at persuading people, or if you really trust your treatment. Some diseases go away by themselves, so if you time your treatment well, people will think you cured them. But that’s not all. Some of the healing would be because of you. Your healing power would come from a strange thing that normal medicine knows about but doesn’t really like: the placebo effect.

C

Placebos are things that do not really treat your body, but they make you feel better because you believe they can help you. Sometimes they are fake pills, but they can also be other things like bandages, crystals, or surgeries. The placebo effect means that even fake things can have good results, but some people who do alternative medicine do not like to talk about it because they think it makes them look like cheats. Actually, the placebo effect is very important for all kinds of medicine, normal or not, but many people do not pay attention to it or do not understand it.

D

We all know that our feelings can affect our body: when we are angry, our face turns red; when we are sad, we cry. But we don't know much about how fake medicines make us feel better. Most of the few studies done on this have looked at how to stop pain because it's a very common problem and easy to test. In these studies, they found out that endorphins, chemicals in our brain that act like painkillers, play a role.

E

A new study by Fabrizio Benedetti from the University of Turin made the case stronger. He showed that a drug called naloxone can stop the placebo effect. The placebo effect is when you feel better because you think you got a medicine, even if you didn't. Benedetti made some people feel pain by pumping air into a band around their arm. He did this many times for many days, and gave them morphine to make the pain go away. On the last day, he secretly gave them salt water instead of morphine. They still felt less pain: that was the placebo effect. But when he put naloxone in the salt water, the pain came back. This showed that the placebo effect works because of natural painkillers in our body. But we don't know how thinking can make these painkillers come out, or why some people can't make the pain go away by thinking.

F

Scientists are not sure how placebos work, but they have learned a lot about how to make them work better. A doctor in London saw that red fake pills helped with pain more than blue, green, or yellow ones. A study on American students showed that blue pills helped them sleep better than pink ones, which were good for making them more alert. Even the name of the pill can matter: if you prefer Aspro or Tylenol for a headache, they may work better than other pills that have the same ingredients.

G

How the treatment is given also matters. Edzard Ernst, a professor who studies different kinds of medicine at Exeter University, says that "doctors who are warm, friendly, and make their patients feel better" are more effective than those who are formal and do not comfort their patients. Warm, friendly, and comforting are also what alternative medicine does well, of course. Many things in that first recipe—the long time they spend, the strong hints of special healing power—are likely to make patients happy. So it is not surprising that people who do things like aromatherapy, acupuncture, herbs, and so on seem to be good at making the placebo effect happen.

H

Some people want to use both alternative medicine and regular medicine together. But this might not work well for many types of alternative medicine. This is because they work mostly or only by making people think they will get better. And people might think they will get better more if they use something different or strange. "We feel that something strange has more power to make us better than something normal. And some alternative healers are very strange," says Ernst.

I

There are other problems with combining different kinds of medicine. Doctors would have a hard time telling their patients to use treatments that don't really work. And people who do other kinds of medicine would probably be looked down on by regular doctors, like they are now. Mixing different kinds of medicine "would make no sense, like mixing science and superstition," said Neville Goodman, a doctor who gives pain relief, in a magazine about health in April.

J

Some people say that a very good surgeon who dresses well, is famous around the world, and promises to fix your problem with an expensive surgery is the best way to make you feel better. But many other doctors lose to many different healers who may not know much about science. What they do know is how to make you happy. And that's very important.

Source:

Advanced 3 (anglophone.ir)