

Book Reviews

Holism and Complementary Medicine

By Vincent Di Stefano

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Reviewed by Anne Cowper

I first met Vincent Di Stefano over 20 years ago when I was struck by his flair for expounding on all matters philosophical, ethical, principled and in fact any other topic with which he was presented! He has finally brought this talent to print in his new book on the origins and principles of holism and complementary medicine.

In the introduction Vincent suggests his book offers both a journey into the past and a projection towards the future (while essentially grounded in the present time) of complementary medicine. He achieves this by dividing the book into two sections: origins and principles.

Origins covers a fascinating voyage through Egyptian medicine, the historical commentaries of Homer, Hippocrates and Pliny, the influence of Greek mythology on early medicine, through the humoral medicine taught by Galen and refined by Avicenna, the scholars of Salerno (the first European school of medicine) and the impact of the work of Paracelsus. He takes us through the middle times to the influence of scientific medicine, the germ theory of disease and the emergence of biomedicine.

In the modern section (Modernity and beyond) he discusses the concerns of the British physician Pappworth, the problems perceived by American lawyer Rick Carlson, the claims of social reformer and former Jesuit priest Ivan Illich, and the pursuits of an active member of the Doctors Reform Society Richard Taylor, to name but a few.

Vincent draws together the relationship between medicine of the past, the later scientific direction, and the ultimate need for re-evaluation of much that has been dismissed.

The second section of the book on principles takes us on a more philosophical journey of the broader contexts of health and disease. He talks of the healing partnership of practitioner and patient, the art of listening and the "sensitive" physician. He explores the methods of Descartes and Newton and the paradigms set around their work, the perspective of Swiss cultural philosopher Jean Gebser who offered some understanding of the dilemmas facing the contemporary world, and the great divider of proponents of complementary and orthodox medicine - the life force.

Much of this philosophical section Vincent accredits to the influence and inspiration of teachers, colleagues and friends, drawing on collaborative discussions with colleagues and using selections from interview transcripts taken over a period of many years.

Highly recommended to all those with an interest in the grass roots and ongoing development of our profession – as we all should be!

Available for loan (Category A) from the NHAA Library.