

# Complementary Medicine

by George Stylian

"Holism and Complementary Medicine Origins and Principles", by Vincent Di Stefano. Published by Allen & Unwin. Publication date: April 2006. RRP (Aust): \$45.00. Book size: 15x23cm; pages: 235.

Vincent Di Stefano is a Victorian-based osteopath and herbalist and holds an MHSc. He has written many articles for professional publications and has presented seminars Australia wide. During the 1990s, he was a lecturer and clinical supervisor in the osteopathic medicine program at Victoria University. In addition, he served as coordinator/lecturer in Qualitative Research Methods (Osteopathy) and as Course Co-ordinator, Graduate Diploma in Western Herbal Medicine.

When Anne Cooper handed me this book to review at last year's AOA radiology seminar, it was an auspicious moment for me, because I had just read a short review of the book and had decided to buy a copy as I thought it looked interesting. She looked at me and said, "You're a herbalist too, so you can review the book". Well, after reading it, interesting is not the right epithet to describe such a rich body of knowledge that is both timely and relevant for our profession. Di Stefano has clearly invested a lot of time and effort in this book and it truly reflects his heart and soul. It is an educational publication that will benefit all people in our field, whether they are students, practitioners or teachers.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, "Origins" consists of three chapters and traces the history of medical thought from Egyptian times to the present. The second section, "Principles", is six chapters in length. Each chapter addresses themes that are integral to the holistic style of complementary medicine. The book also includes a Glossary, which expands on the terms used in the book, and has two reference sections, the first at the end of each chapter, and another, which details all the references, used in the book.

Despite the growth in complementary medicine modalities and their acceptance within the communities of the Western world, there is still not a clear understanding in relation to the origins and the principles of natural medicine. This book tries to bridge that gap and it does so in a very comprehensive

and clear manner. I have found the author's use of language throughout the book very accessible and in many cases very poetic. I felt at times as if the author was there talking directly to me. In the last few chapters, the book gathers such momentum that one understands the personal struggles of the author in trying to champion the human component in the world of reductionist biomedicine. But more on that later!

The first part of the book, "Origins", covers the history of medicine beginning with the ancient Egyptians, to the ancient Greeks, the spread to Europe, and then the beginning of modern medicine in the early part of the twentieth century. I have found Di Stefano's account of the history of biomedicine a much more enjoyable and objective account than that in Richard Bergland's book *The Fabric of the Mind*. Barbara Griggs' account of the history of medicine in *Green Pharmacy* in relation to herbal medicine is a fascinating read as well, but is long, full of detail and serves more as a reference source.

In the first chapter, we are taken back to the time when the ancient Egyptians practiced medicine alongside their religion. The doctors of the day were also the priests. The author reminds us of the antiquity of such practises as colonic cleansing, fasting and restricted dietary regimes, all of which continue to find a place in certain forms of natural medicine. The attention then shifts from the earlier magical forms of medicine to the more rationalistic approaches that gradually emerged in Greece.

The next chapter charts the movement of medicine from the time of Hippocrates, Dioscorides and Galen to its eventual entry into the universities of Europe during the tenth and eleventh centuries. It then details the revolution in medical knowledge that erupted during the Renaissance through an examination of the life and work of such individuals as Andreas Vesalius, William Harvey and Paracelsus.

The final chapter of Part I, "Modernity and Beyond" looks at how medicine in the nineteenth century cleared up the earlier misconceptions regarding human anatomy and disease causation. Spirits or gods were no longer seen as the cause of disease, and sanitation was understood to be central to the prevention of infections. The sciences of anatomy, physiology, pathology and

medicinal chemistry became firmly established in the universities and hospitals where medicine was taught.

In the United States, the John Hopkins University took the lead and redefined medical education within America, and later, much of the rest of the world. Financial support from the Rockefeller and Carnegie empires ensured that they dominated the standard and the way medicine was to be accredited and practiced. If you have read Carol Trowbridge's book, *Andrew Taylor Still 1828-1917* you will hear the echoes from that epoch of medical control and domination, of that time when a small and highly political group within the American Medical Association deemed how the art of medicine was to be practiced. This was precisely the era in which AT Still was trying to integrate osteopathic teaching into medical universities. The millions of dollars invested by the Rockefeller Foundation in the John Hopkins model saw the eventual closure of many small medical institutions worldwide. This chapter is an eye-opener.

The latter part of the chapter examines the growing discontent from both inside and outside the medical profession. The critical reflections of such commentators as René Dubos, Maurice Pappworth, Rick Carlson and Richard Taylor, an Australian doctor and former President of the Doctors Reform Society, are examined in detail.

By the 1970's complementary medicine was starting to gain popularity and it was met with hostility from the medical authorities. Yet despite the attacks, many medical practitioners began to adopt more holistic measures within their medical practices.

The flow from Part I, "Origins" to Part II, "Principles" is smooth and continuous. In the second part of *Holism and Complementary Medicine*, Di Stefano intensifies the debate by incorporating many quotes drawn from interviews with a number of Australian practitioners of osteopathy, naturopathy, herbal medicine, homoeopathy and traditional Chinese medicine. Much of the material presented in the chapters of Part II serves to empower the reader and confirm our belief in, as Dr. Still put it, "the triune nature of man". We really are mind, body and spirit and all parts are interrelated and inseparable.

The language of Chapter 4, "Holism and Reductionism in Medicine" is very smooth and poetic. The author explains how the materialistic, mechanistic, methodical and analytical approaches utilised in the reductionist model gave rise to unprecedented powers of understanding and prediction of natural phenomena. These powers

extended to a greatly increased understanding of the structure and function of the various organ systems of the body. The broader contexts of health and disease are also discussed as well as the deeper dimensions that holism embraces. The merits of both reductionist and holistic approaches are even-handedly addressed.

Chapter 5, "The Healing Relationship", examines the role of the patient/practitioner relationship in healing. The author takes a detailed look at the various forms that the doctor/patient relationship and healing partnership can take. It also examines the art of listening, the sensitive physician and the very particular style of clinical interaction that is part of modern biomedical practice.

The ability of Western medicine to diagnose pathology with certainty is one of the great gifts to the present age. But when it comes to treatment, does biomedicine empower the patient? Most diseases are treated with drugs. Very little is done to activate the inherent healing potential of patients. In Chapter 6, the reader gets connected again to such issues as empowerment, strengthening the patient, igniting the healing powers and looking at vitality, toxicity and regeneration.

Chapter 7, "Turning the Medicine Wheel", examines the role of the mind in health and sickness and explores the meaning of a spiritual or energetic dimension to life. The author starts this chapter by taking us back to the days of Descartes and Newton who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively gave so much to scientific modernism. We also learn that both were deeply involved in theology and that Newton was possibly the last alchemist among the modern scientists. More can be learnt about this period in Philip Ball's fascinating book, *The Devil's Doctor*.

Chapter 8, "Firming the Foundations" looks at the sources of knowledge in both biomedicine and complementary medicine. It offers useful reflections on ways of extending research methods beyond the mathematical approaches of contemporary medical research and calls for a reconsideration of research models that can capably address the particular needs of the more holistic treatment styles of the various modalities of complementary medicine.

The final chapter, "Completing the Circle", raises many important questions. Can biomedicine, by focusing primarily on disease and technology really solve the problems of ill health that continue to increase in our artificial environments? Can we continue to

overlook the link between human health and the environment? Do we take into consideration the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on human health?

We are at a crossroads; we live in the best and worst of times and have enormous freedoms to choose. Can we help recover nature and open the doors toward the future? This chapter brings it all together and empowers the reader to think, to contemplate, to ask questions and to have confidence in the holistic paradigm. A strong finish to an incredible read.

Holism and Complementary Medicine is very well researched and referenced. The use of language is often poetic which makes it easy to read. The book imbues confidence and confirms the validity of holistic and complementary approaches to medicine. It brings back to life the traditional principles of vitalism and shows how they continue to find expression in humanity's

ongoing search for the truths that relate to human health. I have really enjoyed this book and it is going back to my bedside table, as it deserves another read. There is so much in it to digest and learn.

Overall this book is a wealth of information. I highly recommend it!


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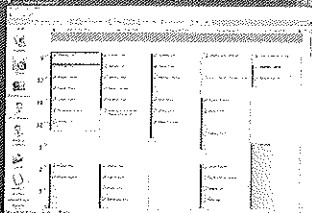
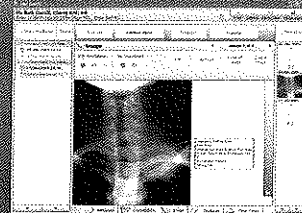
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