

DIAGNOSING THE PROCESS, NOT JUST THE NAME

General Audience Version

Dr. Wally Schmitt

www.DrWallySchmitt.com

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One of Dr. George Goodheart's most valuable parables was about the "zebra in the bathtub." For those who may not have heard him tell it, the idea is something like this: There is a zebra in your bathtub, and he is eating and eliminating you out of house and home and generally making your life miserable.

When someone comes over and tells you that his name is "Charley," then you feel so much better, at least at first. But the knowledge of his name does nothing to solve the fact that there is this offensive zebra in your bathtub who is eating and eliminating you out of your domicile. What IS important is: "How do I get the zebra out of my bathtub?" and secondly, "How did he get there in the first place so I can keep it from happening again?"

Giving the zebra a name is like giving a patient a diagnosis. Many doctors pride themselves in being able to "diagnose" a disease by giving it a name. This is fine as long as the "diagnosis" is not the only goal of the clinician. There must be a therapeutic course implied by a diagnosis. Diagnostics should be therapy oriented rather than an academic exercise.

A few years ago, a young chiropractic college graduate who had not yet started practice proudly related to me how he had "diagnosed" a case of multiple sclerosis in his college clinic. When I asked what had happened to the patient, the reply was "Of course, we referred the patient to a neurologist." The referral with no attempt to care for the patient with natural methods is a perfect example of naming the zebra while totally missing the boat on "understanding the process" of how the problem got there, not to mention what to do about it.

There are a limited number of "processes" of physiology and pathology that are presently understood. However, few clinicians, in any profession, seem to have a grasp on the concept of understanding the processes causing the patient's complaints. If doctors would focus on processes that are fundamental to health and disease, then when confronted with a sick patient, they could "diagnosis the process" and begin specific therapy to change its course. Let's discuss just a few of these processes.

1. **CELLULAR CHEMISTRY:** At the microscopic level of cellular chemistry, there are basically only TWO things that can go wrong. These are imbalances between the fundamental biochemical processes of oxidation and reduction. The proper regulation of oxidation - reduction activity is called homeostasis. Breakdown of this regulation is disease. This is true in every cell in our bodies.

Controlled oxidation is the process whereby our bodies produce the energy needed for all cells to do their jobs. When there is too little oxidation (under-oxidized and/or over-reduced), the result is cellular dysfunction and if the whole body has this tendency, we feel tired, fatigued, or exhausted, depending on degree.

On the other hand, when there is too much oxidation in a cell (over-oxidized

and/or under-reduced), it is like a fire burning out of control. This results in inflammation (swelling) and pain, and in the brain, mental fatigue and emotional symptoms. In autoimmune disease unregulated oxidation results in tissue destruction.

These are fundamental physiological processes that can be measured by a combination of applied kinesiology (AK) techniques and standard diagnosis. If these processes are non-optimal, they can be corrected.

2. NEUROMUSCULAR PATTERNS: Muscles not functioning normally can be in only two states: "turned on" (facilitated) or "turned off" (inhibited). This can get very technical, but it always boils down to a muscle imbalance that is best measured by AK manual muscle testing procedures. When these patterns of dysfunction are identified, the muscles can be returned to normal balance and the patient's complaints relieved.

3. SYMPATHETIC-PARASYMPATHETIC (AUTONOMIC) REGULATION: In organ disturbances, the two factors that relate to problems are imbalances with the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The autonomic (or involuntary) nervous system has two major parts: the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. One can have too much or not enough sympathetic activity. Or one can have too much or not enough parasympathetic activity.

When the sympathetic and parasympathetic imbalances are understood in relation to a particular organ, restoring normal autonomic function produces a great impact on the patient's symptoms. Normalizing sympathetic and parasympathetic activity can achieve either partial or total remission of symptoms, regardless of whatever pathology or functional illness may be present. There are only so many things that can go wrong, and if we fix them, the body responds to the maximum of its ability.

4. GLANDULAR (ENDOCRINE) DYSFUNCTIONS: Although the glandular system or endocrine system seems quite complicated, a dysfunctioning endocrine system presents one of only two problems: too much of a hormone or too little of a hormone. If there is a hormone excess, it may also be for only two reasons: the gland may be producing too much hormone, or the body may not be breaking down (detoxifying) the hormone adequately. If there is too little of a hormone, it is usually because the gland is not producing enough. Even though endocrine interactions can be complex, they can still be boiled down to some hormones that are "too much" and others that are "too little."

5. IMMUNE DYSFUNCTIONS: Like the endocrine system, the immune system can seem complicated. But there are still just two possible processes present when the immune system goes awry - too much or not enough immune system activity. When there is too little immune system activity, we would expect an increased susceptibility to infections. When there is too much immune system activity, the usual result is inflammation and, if severe, tissue destruction associated with autoimmune disease. This is called a hypervigilant immune system. Parts of the immune system can be under active and others over active at the same time creating a somewhat complex presentation. But still, these are simple processes that can be figured out.

D. D. Palmer, the founder of chiropractic said in 1910 that "Too much or not enough nerve energy is disease." Perhaps it would be clearer if he said "Too much or not enough nerve energy is present in disease." But basically, that's it. Anything that goes wrong in the body will be sensed, evaluated, and reacted to by the nervous system.

A large part of a doctor's job should be to identify where there is "too much" or "not enough" and correct the process, not just to take an academic review of

signs and symptoms and assign a patient a "diagnosis." Is it too much or not enough oxidation? Is it too much or not enough muscle activity? Is it too much or not enough autonomic function? Is it too much or not enough endocrine function? Is it too much or not enough immune function? These are the questions that must be asked in order to identify the natural therapies and lifestyle changes that will be most compatible with each +patient's needs.

If another patient comes into my office and in giving me their history, tells me that another doctor has diagnosed his or her problem by giving it a name, but offering no long term solution to the underlying processes that cause it, I will just scream.... No. Actually, I won't. But I WILL once again explain to the patient about the zebra in the bathtub and get on with identifying and correcting the faulty processes which are causing the problem. After it is gone, they can call it anything they want!