

The Dark Ages of Medicine

There comes a time in society when major changes will occur, when old established systems and beliefs are challenged and when an almost revolutionary movement leads to a new direction. I believe we are in such a time now and I believe future historians will look back on these times as the Dark Ages of Medicine.

My particular interest in this process of change is in health but I recognize that there will be a multitude of changes in every aspect of society and that individual health and the nation's health will be a consequence of and a reason for these changes. I am talking about total health, not the idea of health being an absence of disease, the concept we all understand and recognize but which cannot be easily define. This total health is what we might all hope and work towards but may never achieve in full.

We currently have a NHS crisis we are told, the solution we are also told will be to plough more money into it and then we shall have a better Health Service. No amount of increased funding will transform our NHS into a successful health service. Why? Because there is very little interest and time for health within this system. We have in reality a gigantic disease management system. As such it performs remarkably well, given the impossible nature of the task demanded of it.

Imagine a world where none of our cars, lorries, buses, trains, or airplanes were looked after, maintained and serviced regularly, the chaos and mayhem that would ensue would be unbelievable. Every road would be lined with broken down vehicles, airports would be almost unable to function, accidents and breakdowns would be commonplace every minute of every day, garages would be overwhelmed with repairs of ceased-up engines, burnt-out trans-missions and waiting lists for attention would be in months. The cost to our economy of all this, the disruption, loss of working time and damage to people and property would be crippling. This is almost exactly where we are with regards to our individual & the nation's health.

For many years now and particularly after the development of the magic bullets like antibiotics, and high-tech medical procedures that can rescue us from the jaws of death, interest and resources have shifted away from health to disease. This has happened at an individual and national level. Our mind set was once I cannot afford or risk getting ill, I must take care of myself and my family best I can. to It is my right to be cared for and have my diseases cured by doctors, I am not responsible for my own or my family's health, that is the responsibility of the doctor, the specialist or the government

This medical dependency has been cultured by the establishment, by drug companies, by health insurance companies, and even by individuals content to relieve them of the self-responsibility, throwing this burden onto (often willing) doctors who may initially have enjoyed the power and esteem this onerous responsibility seemed to give them. The novelty has worn off, most health careers would gladly have this impossible burden taken from them, but the public may have lost the will or ability to shoulder their own burden of responsibility, they have been weakened like unused limbs, long flaccid in plaster casts. We have mostly lost the innate wisdom and understanding our grandparents may have had. We have lost the confidence to care for ourselves, there is a pathological medical dependency which has a strangle hold on the health of the western world.

So is the future bleak and doomed? No. Like all human developments over history, the pendulum swings one way then, at the crisis point, begins its swing back again.

When we look around there are thousands of small impulses from individuals, organizations, groups and government bodies that are beginning the process of turn about. Increasingly people are asking questions of their health providers, seeking alternative ways of improving their health, trying to maintain their well-being through better lifestyles, avidly reading information on health and illness, seeking out new health coaches who support but do not take over an individual's responsibility. TotalHealthMatters! began here, initially the concept was simply to stage a series of national exhibitions which

would demonstrate a new way forward to a healthier nation. However this would not be enough to generate the interest and debate needed to turn around the megalithic system that was established. There is a brief insight into this “other way” on the website < www.totalhealthmatters.co.uk > , here are brought together some of the best ideas on the nature of health and how we could move individually and as a nation towards less medical dependency and more well-being.

Only by this medical mind-set being eroded and replaced can there be progress.

No person or government can make another person healthy.

Only the individual can do that for themselves.

Before we try to improve the NHS we should at least all agree on what we all mean by health and what we would hope to achieve. Dealing with the easier part of the question first, what could we achieve with a health orientated NHS?

A nation of individuals that depended less on medical support, less on drugs, less on high tech medical intervention and more on self-help, mutual support, low cost alternative medicine and the greater enjoyment of life both at work and at home. Individuals would develop more self-respect, self-assurance and a more optimistic view of their future.

The quest for health is fun, it is not a boring, serious exercise and is no more or less than the individual’s passion for their journey through life. It embraces the rough and the smooth, it needs the extremes of human sadness and happiness as the essential “ingredients” in the total process of self-development and growth towards a whole person.

It is my experience, meeting many people as a therapist over 35 years that those who have been through the highs and lows of life have usually become strong characters enriched by their experiences. Some of my “youngest” patients have been in their eighties and nineties, and

some of the oldest weary souls have been in their prime.

We speak of the “grindstone of life”, it is, I think a very good analogy of our life on earth. Unfortunately more people regard a grindstone as something that wears down and destroys. That it can undoubtedly do, but in the right hands, with the right frame of mind it can sharpen and hone a person to perfection. If a piece of steel is unmoving as the grindstone bears down on it, it will be ground away to nothing but a useless stump and a heap of filings, if however the piece of steel is actively responding to the grindstone, embracing its fearsome cutting power, it can just as easily become a shining razor-sharp sword blade fit for any challenge.

We have suffered, in the West, half a century of growing ease and soft security. Everyday more laws and regulations are heralded which will protect us from more and more trials in life. We have been encouraged to seek the safe way forward, to insure ourselves against all hazards. Our children have been cosseted and carried from safe place to safe place even into adulthood, they have been shielded from the dangers and worries of life. Our medicine has become all pervading in our lives, from birth to death; to suppress the first signs of inflammation, pain or mental distress. The challenge of modern medicine has been to eliminate all dis-ease of mankind; success is measured in the degree of human anesthesia and torpor of spirit. We are heading for a land of pain free zombies, untroubled by the world’s cares, unfeeling of the pains of life, untouched by the infinite awesome majesty of the universe. All joy and fun will be induced and carefully controlled by therapy, by mass virtual reality projections, by mass media education of our beliefs and prejudices, the sane will not be able to survive in the ocean of insanity or, if they do survive, will be seen as a terrible threat to the stability of our society.

Commercial and technological progress has brought its benefits to mankind but at a price, many have lost a sense of reality with regard their needs for food, drink, shelter, clothes, or living with each other. In the richest nations on earth there are millions who are suffering nutritional deficiencies and gross dietary imbalances leading to

chronic ill health, obesity and physical and mental disorders. Most of these conditions are treated by modern medicine in a vain attempt to suppress or palliate the symptoms, or cut out or destroy the sick tissue or organ.

Children are now insensitive to the difference between real and synthetic tastes, flavours, smells or textures, they are willing, enthusiastic consumers of junk food and drink. Self-image is more and more determined by, not what one sees and feels about ones self, but what is needed to meet the fashion magazines and media stories that we are fed on in our daily diet of commercial marketing. The essence of consumerism is a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction with ones lot, and belief in the false promise of more satisfaction and happiness in consuming more or newer products.

Work has for many been reduced to a necessary evil that takes up more than half our waking life, which leads to only the satisfaction of a pay cheque at the end of the week and little else. We can then spend our rewards of this wage slavery during the remaining waking hours on bundles of synthetic fun or distractions.

We are increasingly fearful despite all the valiant attempts by governments, society and parents to eliminate the causes of our fear. We are today beset with the new global epidemic of terrorism, which is more fearsome than any warmongering nation, since it has no boundaries, and has no identifiable face till after the event. We could all be tomorrow's terrorists, the nice guy in the office, the sweet sister both can be driven to acts of terrorism in the right environment. We are beset with worldwide epidemics of AIDS that again knows no boundaries nor cares not whether the victim is young or old rich or poor, of this religion or that. Superimposed on all these current fears is that of the future of our planet, what may have been seen as disastrous climatic changes that might affect our great great grandchildren are now appearing to be imminent if not current. How will we live in a Britain that becomes as inhospitable as the arctic for half the year? How will the USA cope with vast tracts of dessert where once grain grew?

There is no simple solution, there is no quick fix, and it is pointless to hope that science and technology will get us out of all these problems, yet it is not a time for despair and resignation to our fate. No one problem sits alone, all are interconnected. Likewise no one move to a solution of any single minuscule problem can stop at that one problem but will affect all others. If the single tiny step to improve a single problem is of the right action there will be a ripple of healing to all other problems. If we could have the instruments sensitive enough to measure it we could note the movement of the sand on a beach on the other side of the earth when we throw a pebble into the sea. The solution to all these problems is to find what constitutes right action in all our lives.