

## INTEGRATIVE HEALTH THEORY

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Much of the literature examining 'Integrative Medicine' resigns itself to a discussion of Complementary Alternative Medicine (C.A.M.) or a multi-disciplinary approach. It is the purpose of this paper to urge a deeper context for wellness in the form of Integrative *Health* (I.H.). The model's emphasis here on *health* – not medicine - enriches how thought, emotion, ritual behavior, and even spirituality play a significant role not only within the context of illness, but towards general wellness.

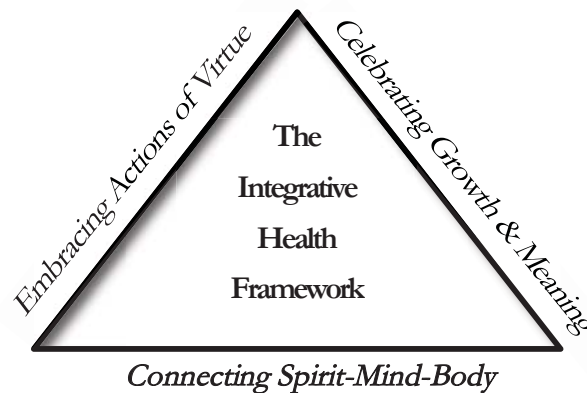
With the possible exception of a few nursing subsets within fields such as oncology, western medicine has viewed the practices of mindfulness, meditation, and prayer as harmless, but not inherent to recovery or general health.<sup>1</sup> Sacred word and ritual were an acceptable and expected part of the healing process from the time of Aristotle and Hippocrates to the apex of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, with the advancement of drugs, surgery, and radiation, consecrative immersion – a communing of mind, body, and spirit - was no longer considered part of an active treatment<sup>1</sup>. This trend continued until the 1950s when a renewed interest in mind-body medicine emerged. From early pioneers such as Dr. Herbert Benson whose work on relaxation and meditation showed positive responses in health<sup>2</sup>, to Pert's psychoimmunologic discovery of "molecules of emotion",<sup>3</sup> to the modern day work of physicians such as Harold Koenig<sup>4</sup>, research continues to find promise in the neurophysiologic changes brought on not only by prayer, but treatments such as music immersion and pet therapy, among many others. It is with recent research momentum and the re-emergence of an understanding of the healing power inherent in a connection to nature and self that the Integrative Health model must become the central framework for theories and applications of health psychology.

There are three driving principles within the model which act as a foundation to any approach to wellness no matter the modality or health provider. The first is found in the patient's embracing of actions of virtue and personal skill. Virtue in this context has a wider consideration than our present day treatment. In ancient Greece, 'virtue' meant any form of excellence. This first precept unifies internal values of growth and gratitude while encompassing the basics of health such as diet and exercise. The second principle of Integrative Health, all too neglected by western medicine, is coherence or life-purpose. Whether examining day to day informal social interactions or religious and sacred belief systems, the I.H. model explores a universality in the transmission and meaning of human experience. Finally, the third principle of this model is a focus on the influence of mind-body medicine from the viewpoints of indigenous belief, eastern *qi* and *prana*, western theism, neuroscience, and even quantum physics - all mechanisms of the singular life-force responsible for biological, emotional, and socio-spiritual well being. There is an emergence of positive thought and behavior as an individual finds harmony through nature and the senses (body), contemplation and reflection of belief and purpose (mind), or through virtuous acts of service and aptitude (spirit).



In addition to each of these principles playing a core role in patient autonomy and intuition – a useful tool whether practicing preventative care or treating chronic disease - the intent of fusing these three driving principles is to also provide a framework upon which future research and interventions may be grounded.

In sum, mainstream western medicine still operates under a narrow definition of health, a residual effect from the biomedical model focusing solely on symptom and disease<sup>5</sup>. Unless a change is advanced, this portends a continued biological materialism where we need only reach for a pill every time we encounter pain or sadness. But it is in recognizing the human capacity to alter our own neuropsychosocial biology that we will help patients and providers welcome such concepts as choice and volitional effort into the vocabulary of science. A second reason of note stands, that adoption of measures and mechanisms to encourage and facilitate these tendencies as part of treatment lends itself to one of the greatest advantages that can come from a shift towards an Integrative Health approach: treating health seekers in a more comprehensive and cost-saving manner. As medicine and health swings further towards an understanding that the cost of prevention is less than intervention, and with strong evidence-based studies in the literature, this model can work within today's policy environment.



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