



The Four Levels of Health – Body, Mind, Emotion and Spirit

(Introduction of some new ideas)

by Jane Cullinane MNZANLP, BA (Psych), HNZD

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Jane Cullinane is a NLP Master Practitioner and Hypnotherapist and runs a private practice in the Waikato (Hamilton, Te Aroha and Whangamata). Jane provides **Inspired Life Solutions** for her clients, who range from teens and young adults to the elderly. Jane has trained as a Shinnick Rapid Depression Treatment therapist and then completed the Rapid Anxiety Treatment training, now seeing clients who want to quickly and effectively recover from Depression, Anxiety, Panic Attacks and Anger Issues. She began **Live*Life*Learning** in 2006 as the teaching arm of her practice – giving power back to participants so they can take over their own healing and transformation, as they gain the skills and learn techniques to help them live their lives to their fullest potential. This includes her six-week Life Coaching 101 course, which she runs for Continuing Education night classes and for corporates in the Waikato, including AgResearch.

It is often said, disease can be looked at through four levels – Body, Mind, Emotions and Spirit. But what does this mean, and how does it relate to your health, in practical terms?

As humans, we have an endless stream of Physical, Emotional, Mental and Spiritual needs that must be satisfied to enjoy our lives fully. Failing to meet any of these can produce suffering and depletion to that area, and eventually in our whole being. Modern science has finally caught up with age-old traditions, and this new science of the body-mind connection is now a field of study called psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI.

You can experience for yourself how your thoughts can affect your physical body. Think of a lemon, a shiny, yellow, juicy lemon. See the sun glinting off it's shining yellow skin. Now imagine cutting it in half, feel the juice as it pours out onto your fingers. Taste the sharp tangy juice on your tongue. Remember the bitterness that almost stings your lips?

How did you feel that last time you tasted this sour juice? Can you remember the smell?

Keep imagining you are sucking this lemon, mmmmmmmh!

Now, notice in your mouth, how much saliva is forming? Your mind has controlled your body – there is no physical lemon, you have not really seen it nor tasted it. You imagined the lemon, you told yourself a story, and your body responded to that story.

Your body started producing saliva is anticipation of the imagined lemon juice. This well-known placebo effect illustrates the extent to which our minds and the story we tell ourselves can affect our physical bodies – that our body and our mind are intimately interrelated.



It is our mind, our unconscious habits and our conscious thinking, which together make up our “story”, that controls our immune system, and our immune system controls our general state of health. To show how much our minds affect our health, much research has been done testing the immune system, using a simple blood test.

One research project first checked the general immune levels of participants, who were then shown a series of pictures. The first half were shown cute baby animals, uplifting and peaceful scenes. The other half saw slaughtered animals, car accidents and war scenes. After this, their immune cell count was taken again at the end of the “viewing”. The immune counts had risen in the first group – that is, they had a higher immune response and would be less likely to catch colds or flu, and be more able to fight rogue cancer cells – the list goes on. As for the second group, seeing the disturbing pictures had lowered their immune response markedly – so this second group were more open to coughs and colds, with their immune systems struggling to cope with invading bacteria/ cancer cells/virus.

These results have been corroborated with further tests on people who meditate, showing a rise in immune cell counts after even a short duration of peace and serenity. Again with university students at exam time, it was found the stress of studying and sitting exams lowered their immune cell count markedly, leading to more ill-health during that time.

So the scientific proof is there; how we think and how we give meaning to, and let ourselves be stressed by, events in our lives directly affects our health.

If illness and disease were ONLY physical, then surgery or the chemical pharmaceutical drugs we take would cure us, once and for all. But we all know stories of people with recurring disease, having been treated physically once, twice or even more. Their body has been healed, but their emotions and their mind (through the “story” they tell themselves both consciously and by their habits) is still ill at ease, re-creating a lowered immune response and their continuing, or re-occurring, illness.

How can these ideas help your health and wellbeing? I am not suggesting people make themselves ill, or consciously create their diseases. I am talking about our unconscious pattern of thinking, our individual way of looking at and making meaning of our world.

It is at this deep level that we run our own personal “stories”. Each of us has our unique perspective on life, and if we look openly and long enough at others actions and choices, we can see they have very different perspectives and can make very different choices than we may have made in the same situation. This begins to open up our worldview, and through the practice of investigating our personal beliefs and stories, checking these are still relevant



to our current lifestyles (and not a relic of our past, unhappy, depressed childhood or our violent and abusive first marriage), we can begin to change our story to one that will assist us staying healthy, happy and positive. This involves more than “positive thinking” – this is the new field of science called Positive Psychology, which includes many ancient and modern teaching and coaching techniques, including Neuro Linguistic Programming.

So those old “witch doctors” and shamans, who grind mud and bull horn into a paste and smear it all over the body of the patient, or who hover hands over the head muttering incantations to drive out “evil spirits”, may be closer to curing the underlying source of a physical disease than the modern-day surgeon in a fully equipped hospital. The witch doctors’ “patient” believes that they have been cured by his powers and potions, so begins to think and act as if they were “better” feeling more healthy and positive about their lives now that the evil spirits have gone!

The surgeon in the hospital may have removed the tumour, or realigned the intestines, but the poor patient has to return to their life of grim drudgery and negative thinking, quickly destroying their immune response and leaving them open for further illness or disease.

Did you know that many people carry the bacteria of Streptococci in their throats? They do not show any symptoms, as their immune systems keep the balance in their favour. This proves that it is NOT the bacteria that “cause” the disease; it is the imbalance in the sufferer’s system that “allows” the disease to take hold, grow and cause a problem.

Next time you have a health issue, try sensing it as a part of you, a part of your whole ecosystem, rather than something that has “come in from the outside and got you”! Your immune system is keen to do it’s job, keeping balance and fighting off bacteria. Your negative, angry or depressed thoughts prevent it from working 100%. Change your view on life, and allow your body to work in your favour!

Alternative, or Complementary, healing is often seen in opposition to orthodox doctors and pharmaceutical drugs. However, it can also mean choosing surgery AND

Glossary

Body — Physical health has been the domain of “medicine” since the early 1800’s, as doctors learnt more about the physical body, they slowly took over what had previously been the “wise-woman’s” domain. Nowadays, Orthodox medicine’s focus on the physical body as a machine is based on what we can see, touch and measure as the ONLY form of human health.

Mind — Science struggles to explain what consciousness is and where in the mechanical body the mind is to be found. The mind is a device so we can interpret all the information our physical senses receive into our body, and allows us to operate at the physical level.

Emotion (Energy in Motion) — Our thoughts and beliefs create our emotions. The stories we tell ourselves consciously or unconsciously cause hormones and peptides to flow through our blood, creating our feelings. As we repeat these stories time and time again, these feelings become habitual, and we “become” our emotions, be it anger or gratitude, blame and resentment or kindness and compassion.

Spirit — We have an innate need to belong to something that is bigger than us. What force created us? In the recent past, our culture included spiritual ritual and practice through religion, and we did have access to some answers to these questions. Now discarded, the spiritual baby has been thrown out with the bathwater. The spirit is like love, and religion is like marriage - the former is always desirable, if not necessary, however the latter is dispensable.

homeopathy, NLP, Bach Flowers, herbs, kinesiology or massage to heal yourself on all levels.

For example, one lady I know was diagnosed with breast cancer – unfortunately this is more and more common these days. She was open to alternative health methods, and did further research specific to breast cancer. She went ahead with the surgery prescribed by her oncologist, however, she chose not to have the recommended follow-up chemo, but instead opted for an alternative intravenous Vitamin C treatment.

Now a healthy and busy insurance agent working between Hamilton and Auckland, she is someone who approached her illness from three different levels – physical (the surgery), mental (Vitamin C therapy), and emotional/spiritual (making changes to lessen her stress and becoming more grateful for what she has in life).

Using this map to view your own health problem from a larger perspective, what is going on in your life (or your STORY of your life) that could allow the imbalance that is showing up as illness in your body at present?

Is it tightness or restriction? Where is tightness and restriction in your life? Your finance, or maybe your relationships.

Are you angry at someone, blaming them for problems in your life? Where can you change your perspective, the meaning you make of this problem?

How can we create a system of wellness for ourselves? By using a mix of alternative therapies and your doctor, devise a plan to treat the physical (the diseased tissue), the emotional (our feelings and beliefs about ourselves), and the mind (our patterns and the stories we tell ourselves and the meaning we make of the world around us). Don't forget



the spiritual – this is the deepest level, where we question our existence and ask what is our purpose here. We need to acknowledge that human part of us, where we want to reach out, connect and share.

Good health is one part of our entire eco system, and by working with a team within yourself, body, mind, emotions and spirit, we can move towards a healthier and more whole life.

