

Homeopathy & Holistic Treatment

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First published in April 2015 at www.energiclinic.co.nz

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This article is the first in a series of short essays focused on particular principles that are important in homeopathy, and how I as a homeopath demonstrate them. These principles are not exclusive to homeopathy, but I think it is the collection of all these principles together that makes homeopathy a very special health practice.

Formal definitions of 'holism' and 'holistic'

Holism (a root word for *holistic*) is generally understood to mean...

... a theory that the universe (and especially living nature) is correctly seen in terms of interacting wholes (as of living organisms) that are more than the mere sum of elementary particles.

From: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holism

So, *holistic* would thus be defined as...

...relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts.

From: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/holistic

And the *holism theory of health* has been described by some as...

...the theory of the importance of taking all of somebody's physical, mental, and social conditions into account in the treatment of illness.

From: Encarta Dictionary English (U.K.)

People as complex adaptive systems

The way I like to think about holism in health is to regard people as **complex adaptive systems**. What do I mean by this? Well, first let me briefly clarify what complex systems (whether adaptive or otherwise) are in general.



Complex systems are ...well... complex. A complex system is a collection of component parts that interact in such a way that, together, the system achieves something more than the sum of its parts. Complex systems are now recognised everywhere in nature and society. Have you seen a flock of birds flying? Or a shoal of fish? These are just two examples of complex systems in action in nature.

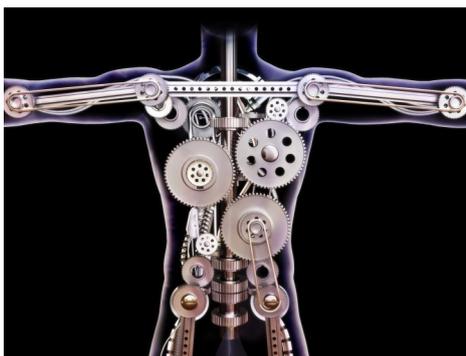


So how do complex systems work? Scientists across very diverse fields such as physics, astronomy, chemistry, environmental science, meteorology and climatology, economics and social sciences and many fields of biology are researching the behaviours and attributes of complex systems. They have found that all complex systems (adaptive or otherwise) have a number of shared attributes such as self-organisation, additional energy requirements and vague system boundaries that may make it difficult or impossible to define what is and is not part of the system. Interactions among parts of the system are plentiful with feedback communications that moderate these interactions to either dampen or amplify them. Further, the various interactions are not dependent on a predominant control mechanism (like a brain) telling each part what to do. Instead, organisational responsibilities are distributed throughout the system with component parts following repeated 'rules'. **Complex adaptive systems** are special complex systems in that they are able to learn from (or adapt to) changes either from within the system or from the outside (their environment).

As a consequence of all these above attributes, complex systems (especially the adaptive kind) behave differently (often surprisingly so) compared to what might be predicted if one were to study each of the system's component parts separately.

This latter point is very important in health because human beings are an example of a complex adaptive system in nature. Biological researchers have estimated the human body physically contains more than 30 trillion cells. Each cell experiences a plethora of molecular-level interactions within itself and with its direct neighbours, as well as, with cells in different tissues and organs in other parts of the body. Expanding outward and considering the whole person, we interact in complex ways with each other and our environment that affect us either positively or negatively. We remember, learn and (hopefully) adapt. We have spiritual connections that transcend our physical being and physical world. All of this makes us and our health and well-being incredibly, mind-boggling complex.

Yet, some health practices (especially conventional medicine, and covertly, some complementary medical therapies) are practically devoid of research in to understanding complex adaptive systems.



Thus, these therapies still hold simplistic mental models of the human body as a complicated, but very predictable machine. And as a consequence, their practices (e.g. use of pharmaceutical drugs and high-dose nutritional supplements) can result in adverse side-effects (i.e. unintended consequences) with potentially long-term serious harm.

Homeopathy is holistic

As a homeopath, I value people as complex adaptive systems.

This means that I recognise the plentiful interactions that my client has with other people (e.g. their family, friends, occupational and social networks), their companion animals, their surroundings (e.g. natural environment, weather, harmful pollutions), other biological agents (e.g. their food, beneficial gut flora, harmful germs), their spiritual beliefs and connections. And I bring this understanding into my practice.

The following is a hypothetical case intended to briefly illustrate how holism in the homeopathic process works. Presenting Nancy's (not a real client, but an amalgam of many clients) particular story only scratches the surface of every person's unique health story.

A portion of the information gathered during the consultation: Nancy has come for a consultation that lasts nearly 1.5 hours. She is in her mid-40's with two teenage children and a loving partner (second marriage for both of them). She is employed in a mid-level management role, and although this can mean long hours, she likes what she does and feels valued within the company. Despite all the good things in her life, she often feels very sad and like she could weep (even though she can't make herself cry). She doesn't want anyone to console her, so she doesn't tell her family or friends about these feelings – they will only rally around her and make it worse for her. Her GP has suggested depression medication, but she's worried she would have to be on this for a long time and she is about side effects and other people's biases. The sadness is worse right before her menses, but better if she spends time alone on the beach. She also feels bloated and gets headaches with her menses (which can be irregular). She used to get headaches as other times too (especially when she was out in the sun too long). She sometimes gets cold sores. There is a history of hypertension in her family. Her headaches began in her first year of university. "For some reason," Nancy says, "I stopped feeling carefree and became much more serious. I had a really close childhood friend, and we just kind of drifted apart." She pauses. "You know, I haven't thought about my former friend in years. I wonder why we never stayed friends." She pauses again and then a sad look comes over her face. "I remember now. Her boyfriend at the time sort of sexually attacked me and it upset me a lot. That happened the summer after high school. I've never told anyone that story before – even my friend."



What happened after the consultation: After some reflection, Nancy was prescribed Natrum muriaticum -- a remedy made from simple table salt.

What happened soon after the remedy was taken: Nancy had been warned that when she took the remedy, some old symptoms might return or her current symptoms might get a little worse before they got better. Within a few hours of taking the remedy, Nancy had a pounding headache and she had to lie down in a dark room for a while. She had a big cry, a long nap and woke up feeling much more refreshed than she usually does.

Now 2 years later: Nancy says, "The remedy was amazing! Three little pills over three weeks and I never get headaches any more. I don't even get the cold sores. The only times I want to cry now is during sad movies. When my partner sees my eyes tear-up, he gives me a hug and it's all good again," she laughs. "I never did get that depression medication. I didn't need it."