



The Gawler Foundation

An integrated approach to health
healing and wellbeing

Review paper

Mind-body medicine: Science, practice and philosophy[©]

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Abstract Ancient approaches to health have been, in essence, holistic. Well-being, illness and healing were strongly connected to the mind, society, morality, spirituality and ecology. No part of our life and experience could be walled off from any other. In the 19th and 20th centuries, however, with the rise of reductionistic science and a generally more materialistic society, this holistic view has been replaced by a more mechanistic one. Most recently, with the rise of collaborative research and new fields of science such as mind-body medicine (MBM), there is gathering evidence that there was a practical wisdom in the ancient approach. Although the mechanisms which science attempts to elucidate now are infinitely complex than the ancients knew, the principles are extremely simple and, as such, they have enormous potential for successful integration into modern clinical practice. This uptake needs to be governed by sound clinical practice and the best available evidence.

MBM simply reminds us that psychological states like chronic stress, depression, anxiety and fear, along with our social context, produce profound effects upon the body and health. Psychological states and social context can also have an enormously positive influence. These effects manifest themselves on many different levels, from the superficial experience of muscle tension to the subtleties of how our genes express themselves. Over time negative mental and emotional states take a heavy toll on the body and are a significant risk factor for many illnesses. Research suggests that many, but not all, psychosocial interventions can play an important part in ameliorating this effect. MBM has enormous scope and clinical potential but has been relatively slow to make its way into mainstream medical education and practice. This lack of general awareness may be the product of many things including a lack of access to information, bias against what does not fit current scientific paradigms, and lack of funding for things which are of lesser commercial potential. Ease of access to skills and information through medical literature and education will be important means for redressing some of this imbalance. Growing community interest and a need to foster approaches which provide superior cost-benefits are also likely to increase the uptake of MBM approaches. This article will give a broad overview of the medical literature in the field of MBM, discuss some of the practical aspects of using a mindfulness



meditation approach to stress management and raise some of the interesting associated philosophical and practical questions.

A pdf file of the full article (85 pages) can be found at www.gawler.org/research

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