NATP121

Session Two

Vis Medicatrix Naturae

Naturopathy Department
Session Overview

- Define the principle *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*
- Philosophy of Vitalism
- History of Vitalism
- Spirituality and VMN
People can study their life force in the same way that a master gardener studies a rosebush. No gardener ever made a rose. When its needs are met a rosebush will make roses.

~Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

(Pxhere, 2017)
Naturopathic Principles

- First, Do No Harm (*primum non nocere*)
- Healing Power of Nature (*vis medicatrix naturae*)
- Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*)
- Treat The Whole Person (*tolle totum*)
- Doctor as Teacher (*docere*)
- Prevention (*preventare*)
Vis Medicatrix Naturae

- The healing power of nature is the inherent self-organising and healing process of living systems which establishes, maintains and restores health. Naturopathic medicine recognises this healing process to be ordered and intelligent. It is the naturopathic physician's role to support, facilitate and augment this process by identifying and removing obstacles to health and recovery, and by supporting the creation of a healthy internal and external environment

(Zeff & Snider, AANP, 1989)
Vis Medicatrix Naturae

- Nature acts powerfully through healing mechanisms in the body and mind to maintain and restore health. Naturopathic physicians work to restore and support these inherent healing systems when they have broken down by using methods, medicines and techniques that are in harmony with natural processes (Pizzorno & Murray, p.81)
In considering this definition, what is the difference between the Vis Medicatrix Naturae, vitalism, and vitality?
Vitalism

- Vitalism is a philosophy, the premise of which is that nature has an innate and intentional striving that perpetuates life in a self-sustaining and purposive manner.

- The historical Western influences of naturopathy are important to explore and ground the philosophy.
Historical Emergence of Vitalism

- Animism is the oldest known type of belief system, holding that objects, places and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence.

- Essentialism from Platonic idealism described ‘essence’ (which characterises a substance or a form) as permanent, unalterable, eternal; and present in every possible world (Bird, 2009).
Historical Emergence of Vitalism

- Hippocratic medicine believed organisms left alone can often heal themselves.

- Πνεῦμα (πνεῦμα) and psyche (ψυχή) are words used to define breath, breath of life, spirit and soul and was thought to have originated as a concept of Anaximenes.

- Galen, for example, believed that the ‘pneuma zoticon’ derived from the air was responsible for the source of the vital fire in the left ventricle of the year.

  (Gilbert, 1981)
Historical Emergence of Vitalism

- Intelligent design (Socrates), suggests the order of nature showed evidence of having its own human-like "intelligence"

- Teleological argument (Aristotle), suggests a cosmic intelligence is responsible for the natural order, but a "creator" is not required to physically make and maintain this order

- Teleology is the belief that things are purposeful and aimed towards a goal.
Historical Emergence of Vitalism

- *Naturphilosophie* was founded by German Romantics (18th and 19th century) and is a theory of the unity of nature which attempted to achieve a speculative unity of nature and spirit.

- They held the view of the natural world as a kind of giant organism.
Historical Emergence of Vitalism

- Gaia hypothesis (James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis) asserts that living organisms and their inorganic surroundings have evolved together as a single living system that greatly affects the chemistry and conditions of Earth’s surface.

- Biophilia hypothesis (Erich Fromm, E.O. Wilson) is the urge to affiliate with and love other forms of life. The psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital. Suggesting that connection with nature will lead to conservational efforts, positive psychological development etc.
Vitalism in Other Whole Medical Systems

Eastern Whole Medical Systems

○ Ayurvedic medicine – prana
○ Tibetan medicine - prana
○ Traditional Chinese medicine – chi/qi

Western Whole Medical Systems

○ Unani-Tibb medicine - Quwwat-e-mudabbira
Try and penetrate with our limited means the secrets of nature and you will find that, behind all the discernible concatenations, there remains something subtle, intangible and inexplicable. Veneration for this force beyond anything that we can comprehend is my religion.

~ Albert Einstein, Response to atheist, Alfred Kerr (1927)
Spirituality, Religion and VMN

- Spirituality is seen as a search or quest for the sacred in life, a seeking of answers to life's most meaningful and vital questions.

- Religion is described as the organised system of beliefs, practices and rituals and symbols that are designed to facilitate closeness with the sacred and provide the average person with moral and social guidelines for behaviour.

(Grant, 2012)
History of Spirituality and Religion in Naturopathy

- Nature-cure hygienists, e.g. Kneipp, Kloss, Lindlhar, were Christian men who taught that living by nature's laws was a way of obeying God's will.

- They saw illness as happening to those who did not follow the laws of nature, and that a return to health, whilst incorporating sunshine, fresh air, rest and wholesome food, also meant living a moral life.

(Grant, 2012)
History of Spirituality and Religion in Naturopathy

- Benedict Lust was influenced by the writings of Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science and Helen Wilmans’ Mental Science. Both suggest disease is in the mind.

- Christian Science - reality is purely spiritual, the material world an illusion. Avoids medical treatment, relying instead on Christian Science prayer.

- Mental Science - intellectual growth leads to ultimate and perfect redemption from all the ills of life, including disease, old age, poverty and death (Wilmans, 1902)
Opposed Philosophy

- Socratic method - logic, objective science
- Materialism/physicalism/naturalism
- Reductionism
- Mechanism/pathological mechanism
Homoeostasis and VMN

- The *vis medicatrix naturae* in a clinical practice context is defined by Zeff et al. (2012) as the tendency for physiological systems to gain equilibrium via intentional self-organisational processes.

- This is open to metaphysical or naturalistic interpretation.
Homoeostasis and VMN

- Through most of the twentieth century, biology’s image as a valid science has been gauged by how closely it adheres to the norms of “objective” sciences like physics, chemistry and mathematics.

- Homoeostasis is an example of a living system whose properties including purposefulness, design, and intentionality.

  (Turner, 2013)
Homoeostasis and VMN

- Walter Cannon's notion of homeostasis had its origins in *vis medicatrix naturae*.

- "All that I have done thus far in reviewing the various protective and stabilising devices of the body is to present a modern interpretation of the natural *vis medicatrix*" (Cross & Albury, 1987)
Vis Medicatrix Naturae in Clinical Practice

Naturopathic Therapies:
- Diet/nutrition
- Lifestyle/hygienics
- Homoeopathy
- Flower essences
- Hydrotherapy
- Herbalism
- Various types of energy medicine
Vital Force

- (Philosophy) A basic force, independent of physical and chemical forces, regarded as being the causative factor of the evolution and development of living organisms (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

- (Noun) The energy or spirit which animates living creatures; the soul (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.)

- *Vis medicatrix naturae* defines health as good vitality where the vital force flows energetically through a person’s being, sustaining and replenishing us, whereas ill health is a disturbance of vital energy (Connolly, 2014, p.3)
Vital Force in Homoeopathy

The material organism, without the vital force, is capable of no sensation, no function, no self-preservation, it derives all sensation and performs all the functions of life solely by means of the immaterial being (the vital principle) which animates the material organism in health and in disease.

~Hahnemann, Organon of Medicine
Vitality

- Vitality is the manifestation of the VMN in an organism.

- The VMN is always there, while the vitality can be lower or higher in an individual.

- This can be due to numerous factors: genetic potential, stressors and the effects on the body, nutrition/lifestyle.

- Assessing the individual’s vitality can be a useful diagnostic tool for treatment interventions.
Vitality in Clinical Practice

- How do you know when your vitality is low? What are the external and internal signs and symptoms?

- What are signs of high vitality? Low vitality?

- How do you increase your vitality?
Your deepest roots are in nature. No matter who you are, where you live, or what kind of life you lead, you remain irrevocably linked to the rest of creation.

~Charles Cook
"What then do I mean tonight by the healing power of nature? I mean to refer to the way in which Nature ministers to our minds, all more or less diseased by the rush and racket of civilization, and helps to steady and enrich our lives. My first point is that there are deeply-rooted, old established, far-reaching relations between Man and Nature which we cannot ignore without loss... there would be less "psychopathology of everyday life" if we kept up our acquaintance... we have put ourselves beyond a very potent vis medicatrix if we cease to be able to wonder at the at the grandeur of the star-strewn sky, the mystery of the mountains, the sea eternally new, the way of the eagle in the air, the meanest flower that blows, the look in a dog's eye."

Professor J. Arthur Thomson "Vis Medicatrix Naturae"
Keynote Address at the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association, 1914.
Connection to Nature

- *Naturphilosophie* is a pantheist philosophy of Nature as an all-pervading force and higher power that ordered the universe. It held that knowledge was only attainable by those who truly appreciated and respected nature.

- Biophilia is “the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life”. It encourages us to understand other organisms and in doing so place greater value on them and ourselves. (Wilson, 1984)

- What do we gain by reconnecting to nature?
The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.

~ Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods
Connection to Nature


- Nature Deficit Disorder is a description of the human costs of alienation from nature.

- Louv (2005) argues it to be a causative factor in the rise of behavioural and metabolic issues in both children and adults.

- How can we bring nature back into our lives?
Connection to Nature

- How do naturopaths utilise the healing power of nature that comes from outside the patient?

- A natural substance or force correctly taken in by the patient is bringing the healing power of nature to that client.
In every culture and in every medical tradition before ours, healing was accomplished by moving energy.

~Albert Szent-Gyorgyi
Modern Energy Medicine

- Concept refers to two kinds of energy fields:
  - Veritable: can be measured, examples include vibrational energy (sound), and electromagnetic forces such as visible light, magnetism and monochromatic radiation (lasers).
  - Putative: cannot be measured quantitatively with current technology, examples include acupuncture, homoeopathy, flower essences, reiki, prayer.
Modern Energy Medicine

Common therapeutic concepts

- Belief in universal substance (vitalism – the VMN, vital force, primal energy, or vibration)

- Human beings are a network of complex energy fields that interface with physical/cellular systems

- Use of energy to positively affect energetic systems that are out of balance
Ending Quote for the Day

Now we face overwhelming evidence that we are not smart enough to recover Eden by assault . . . . We see how everything—the whole world—is belittled by the idea that all creation is moving or ought to move toward an end that some body, some human body, has thought up.

~Wendell Berry
References


References


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