

Spirituality and health

Duchowość i zdrowie

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Artykuł dotyczy filozofii i kultury zdrowia. Autorka przedstawia różne punkty widzenia na temat głównych elementów zdrowia i zdrowego stylu życia. Największy nacisk położono w artykule na czynniki fizyczne, emocjonalne i duchowe w etiologii chorób oraz możliwości zapobiegania chorobom.

Słowa kluczowe: duchowość, filozofia i kultura zdrowotna, zdrowy styl życia, stan przedchorobowy, praktyki sanitarno-edukacyjne

The article dwells upon the philosophy and culture of health. The author presents different points of view on the main components of health and healthy lifestyle. The focus of this article is on subdivision of diseases into physical, emotional and spiritual ones, and ways of their prophylaxis.

Key words: spirituality, philosophy and culture of health, healthy lifestyle, pre-disease, sanitary-educational practice

© Hygeia Public Health 2013, 48(2): 148-151

www.h-ph.pl

Nadesłano: 20.04.2013

Zakwalifikowano do druku: 07.05.2013

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The topic of correlation of spirituality and health, especially in the last decade, has become very important and has been actively debated not just by clergymen, but also by physicians and their patients. The knowledge of human nature is a vital necessity and the element of general culture of an individual. We should help our medical students to understand the meaning of such concepts as “health”, “healthy lifestyle”, and “culture of health”, etc. Unfortunately, the majority of courses at medical universities mostly give the information on human diseases, without any detailed explanation how to take care of health.

We can define health as a natural dynamic state of the body, which is characterized by its internal and external balance with the environment in the spiritual, physical and social terms, and effectively prevents disease. World Health Organization defined health as a state of full physical, spiritual and social welfare. Health is a specific non-static category, it can change and we should take care of it, be in harmony with the environment and lead a healthy lifestyle.

The balance of a human being with the environment provides a favorable combination of conditions of life both natural (temperature, pressure and other physical parameters) and social (culture, way of life, social and industrial relations).

The internal balance means balanced cooperation of all its functional systems: cardiovascular, respiratory, nervous, endocrine, etc. Internal harmony provides psychic balance and spiritual integrity of the individual.

There are some important aspects of health, among them spiritual, psychological, physical, and social ones. Spiritual aspect of health involves the understanding of the integrity of our identity, defines the sense of our life, and our internal harmony. The necessary part of spiritual health of a person is their capacity for empathy and compassion, honesty, kindness, and tolerance. Psychological aspect of health is a balance of psychic processes and their manifestations and it is an ability of people to cope with stressful situations, a life based on the co-understanding and emotional comfort in society, as well as personal inner comfort. Physical aspect of health provides optimum performance of all systems of human body (cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular, etc.). This notion of “physical health” is based on the ability to control the body, of physical endurance, high efficiency and employability. Social factor of health helps to understand the significance of health for social and individual life. The society has to support human health, because a healthy citizen can do maximum for the society’s successful development.

Unfortunately, globalization and scientific-technical progress have negatively affected spiritual, psychic and physical health of people.

There are many alarming trends, such as: rapid development of biotechnology, genetic engineering, and technology for modulation of the DNA structure; rapid development of information technology and increasing range of information (exponentially); active environmental degradation; the emergence of new types of dependencies (computer, games), and strengthening the traditional ones (drug, alcohol and carbohydrate); increase of polarity between wealth and poverty; concentration of vast wealth and power in the hands of limited groups of people; depletion of the huge number of people, etc. The general sense of these trends suggests that the recent development of civilization distorted and disrupted the natural integrity of all life processes, which have common basis, and which maintain spirituality and spiritual institutions of society. Moral laws for thousands of years were the criteria for human life, which kept an ongoing process of human evolution in their natural development. Today, the whole system of evolutionary ascent and harmonious movement of life is being destroyed and replaced by a surrogate model of "Quick success". It does not encourage the spiritual evolution of an individual, but encourages human selfishness, driven by calculating, cold-blooded, integral behavior, and is completely directed by unspiritual mind. This trend is one of the most disturbing and dangerous nowadays and spiritually developed people have to do their best trying to correct this situation, because all of us can see the increasing of the proportion of cancer and cardiovascular diseases; the emergence of a number of new and previously unknown diseases and syndromes (orphan ones); general increasing of mental load, the appearance of burnout and chronic fatigue; increasing proportion of mental illnesses and disorders (Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, etc.); increased number of suicides; the deterioration of quality of life and quality of death and the weakening of all types of health from a huge number of people who became hostages of the achievements of scientific and technical progress, full and absolute freedom of human ego and super-ego. Clergymen and Christian physicians subdivided diseases into physical, emotional and spiritual ones. First of all, we should define the disease. The disease is a violation of vital activity under the influence of harmful irritants of external or internal surroundings. In this situation the adaptation of organism to the external environment becomes lower, but at the same time all defenses are mobilizing.

The origin of human diseases in philosophic understanding is a very interesting thing. Our students

prepared numerous abstracts devoted to this topic during elective courses "Contemporary civilization and culture" and "World civilization". They mentioned that natural and social factors were among the main causes of diseases.

One of the factors that cause diseases is insufficient adaptability of the human body to the very complex of living conditions. This set includes the physiological features of the human body (depending on gender, age, etc.), climatic and social (life, social and industrial relations, etc.), and also the individual's accommodation. Heredity can cause the diseases, at the basis of which there are genetic processes, which give the chance for the transmission of disease from one generation to another. Diseases can be the result of natural and definite biological processes that occur in the body from birth up to senescence and death. There were some abstracts devoted to psychosomatic origin of diseases. One report in particular caused a lot of discussion. The basis of that concept (author: Estonian gynecologist Luule Viilma) is that emotional situation of individuals and different kinds of stress cause specific diseases and disorders. At the basis of cardiovascular diseases there is feeling of guilt, fear affects kidneys and adrenals, and malevolence causes dermal affection. Moreover, we should take into account the level of stress (low, middle, or high), which is also important. The mixture of all stresses (feeling of guilty, fear and malevolence) causes health problems, from psychological to oncologic disorders. The discussions were very hot. In conclusion, the students underlined that it was a very complicated problem, and here we had not just problems of physical body (they are usually the result of mental and emotional disorders), but mostly spiritual ones.

People should not forget that spiritual evolution is one of the main targets of human life. Indian tradition subdivided the vital rhythm of a human being into four periods: first one is a period of knowledge accumulation, second one is a period of social realization; third one is a period of the soul development, and the fourth one is the period of spiritual development (period of wisdom). There are many scientific investigations devoted to the first and second periods of the formation of human identity. The third and fourth ones have just started to be searched by scientists. Without a developed soul and spirit there is no true health. Following moral rules and principles is the guarantee of mental and physical health of the society and of the individual. Medical specialists faced with different kinds of patients understood that moral and spiritual people were always healthier than immoral and soulless. They are healthier, because they always have an invisible protector – morality, which protects them from errors, defects, passions, habits and inclina-

tions. Actually, we can say that the health is a mirror of human spirituality. Unspiritual man in this respect is less protected from all the negative factors, all the temptations and vices of the modern world, which have become incredibly sophisticated, ruthless and cruel. So, spiritual way of evolution is a kind of the main means for mankind to escape technological, ethical and environmental disaster. That is why many areas of human activity, and especially medicine, which is focused on health problems started to pay the attention to the category of spirituality. Speaking about the manifestation of spirituality in modern medicine, we cannot ignore the topic of ethics and bioethics, which have become extremely important in recent years in connection with the creation of a number of new biotechnologies in such areas as palliative medicine (anesthesia and euthanasia); transplantation (fence donor agencies); psychiatry (treatment of various types of dependencies and disorders based on neuro-linguistic programming and coding on conscious and subconscious levels); genetic engineering (gene transfer for the DNA repair); cloning of organisms (manipulation of stem cells and the DNA structures); bio-module approaches with the use of nanotechnologies (creation of the control devices implanted into different organs and body systems), etc. However, people started to understand that the development of new technologies should be obligatorily accompanied by the spiritual component to protect mankind from directing of new inventions and researches against the human being. If we looked at the trend broadly, we would see that in recent years many large institutions associated with science started to open special centers and offices, specifically for studying the aspects of spirituality in medicine. For example, the largest: Center for Spiritual Health, University of Minnesota (CA), Center for the Study of Health, Religion and Spirituality of the State University of Indiana (Terry Howth), Center for Spiritual Health, University of South Carolina, Center for Religion and Health, Texas Medical Center (Houston), the Institute of Spirituality and Health named after George Washington (Washington), European Research Institute for Mental Health, Langental (Switzerland), Department of Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, King's College London (UK), Center of Spirituality, Health and Disability, the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), the International Centre of Nursing St. Louis, Paris (France), etc. Hopefully, all these centers will assist people in getting positive results of treatment and prophylaxis of many diseases. Physicians should help patients not only by giving them urgent medical aid and care, but also should form the understanding that the main responsibility for the health is the task of each individual.

Unfortunately, the majority of the population are sure that "medicine will help" and do nothing for the support of their own health. Yes, contemporary medicine can do a lot, but each person should take care of their lifestyle and do everything for their own healthy future. Because of that, courses of valeology, and any forms of sanitary-educational work will be useful in the campaign against total "illiteracy" in the sphere of healthy and optimal nutrition, hygiene, formation of health awareness. It is necessary to explain to the population how to react on the specific "third condition" (pre-disease) of their body. The majority of mankind nowadays has that status. Some factors of physical, chemical, biological, psychological and other modern conditions of life, lead to the development of diseases, and to the emergence of a number of common symptoms of the "third condition" (neurasthenia, loss of appetite, or even anorexia, irritability, headache, dry skin, etc.). People are in "the third condition", when they are constantly exposed to harmful chemicals. These substances appear in food additives, as well as in synthetic drugs, exhaust vehicle fumes, and a number of industries. People who use drugs, alcohol and tobacco are also in the "third condition", because these substances are harmful for their health. Most of the people are in the "third condition" due to improper diet and lack of ability to follow a healthy lifestyle. The effect of various adverse factors is primarily the change in the general condition, well-being and disability, but not in disease. Such changes in the body are a manifestation of the „third condition" or pre-disease. The disease lasts for several days, weeks, months or longer, the „third state" can last for years, decades and even a lifetime. Such people use only about half of their natural psychophysical possibilities. Valeological knowledge can inform people of peculiarities of the "third condition" and variants of its overcoming.

Patients should get psychological and also spiritual advice to avoid health problems in the future. The role of non-governmental organizations here may be valuable. The author of this paper has the experience of participation in the project "Healthy family – healthy nation". I give the elementary knowledge to the groups of people in neighboring villages and town, trying to form the habits of optimal nutrition. In a 15-week course people find out about the main points of healthy eating (elementary knowledge of the role of proteins, fats, carbohydrates and water in everyday life). We use scientific information from leading dietitians and nutritionists. The result in these schools is positive. The majority of students started to feel better revising their food rations, water-intake regime, and controlling calories (taking into account the optimal correlation of proteins, fats and carbohydrates). I think this experience is positive and helps

people to lose excess weight and to avoid overweight, forming the habits of healthy eating.

A healthy lifestyle is very important for human health and people can use the positive experience of senior generations. Healthy lifestyle is an activity aimed at the creation, maintaining and strengthening of the health of people as a necessary condition for the progressive development of society in all its directions.

Following a healthy lifestyle affects the formation, preservation and strengthening of health, promotes intellectual and spiritual development.

A healthy way of life, positively affecting health, spirituality, moral guidance, formation of certain traits (liberty, optimism, commitment) and other qualities, facilitates the psycho-emotional coping with stress, and indicates high level of mental health.

Healthy lifestyle helps a person to understand the sense of life. It brings some degree of compassion, kindness, tolerance to the human character. A healthy lifestyle also contributes to the self-realization of a person. The method of self-realization of the individual depends on their aspirations, as well as on the scale of moral values they uphold.

Thus, a healthy lifestyle promotes social health of the individual and the society as a whole. It includes the value of high order, as directed by the humanization and intensification of human activities, an improvement of individual personality traits.

Academic I.P. Pavlov argued that health is a precious gift of nature, unfortunately not given forever, and we should take care of it. But human health is largely dependent on an individual, on the lifestyle, working conditions, food, and even habits.

The discussions of health problems are connected with the role of faith and church for human being are usual for such topics. The students mentioned that believers usually recover from diseases better than non-believers, and they do not suffer from deep depressions like ordinary people. Therefore, in conclusion, we should underline that the new generation of medical specialists seek for spiritual knowledge and our task is to assist them in this search. We have to form the culture of health, because it is an important component of the general culture. It will help to preserve the health of the population.

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