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*The concept of holistic education as the alternative  
to technologisation of medicine*

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Koncepcja edukacji holistycznej  
alternatywą technologizacji medycyny

Medicine is confronted with a difficult dilemma because on the one hand it would like to maintain leadership in health protection and on the other, it must extend its viewpoint and understanding of health and illness. It is not a simple problem as for the last 200 years in good faith a model of biomedical understanding of the world, the man and health has been created.

The discussion on the conceptual range of health and illness as the new knowledge recently created and the sphere of practical activities remains an open issue. In medical, psychological and sociological literature various approaches to this issue are suggested and they are not always appropriate and explaining its essence and meaning. There is one unquestionable fact that during the last century a substantial change in defining health has taken place. Traditional interpretation of health understood as the lack of disease and evaluated in terms of fighting the diseases was based on medical sciences. Recently a new insight has been introduced into health and it emphasises a positive attitude towards health and illness.

## HOLISM IN MEDICINE

The development of medicine during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is mainly represented by surprising discoveries, for instance in genetics, and by new possibilities in diagnostics, therapy and also rehabilitation. This trend of development in medicine seems to bring a human organism to the level of complex system which can be "repaired" or improved during therapeutic interventions (Aleksandrowicz, 1988). The fascination with technology and diagnostic achievements results in a disordered communication between a physician (a nurse) and a patient.

There is a clear tendency of rational and pragmatic attitude towards a patient that is evaluated sometimes by the results of the investigations and the achievements in medicine. However, a patient wants to be treated with empathy and warmth. Hence a great success of healers or in general people dealing with everything that physicians are not concerned with, namely the patients' psyche. Here a question should be put forward if the domination of technological paradigm of interventions in medicine is inevitable. Certainly the alternative may be and is a simultaneous creation of holistic paradigm which is based on humanism and subjective treatment of the patient.

Holism according to Bertalanffy is "a system in which the whole universe is a living whole consisting of various parts called holons. The holons create multi-level and interrelated structures of narrower and narrower degree of complexity" and further on he notices that a man in this concept is a holon consisting of such sub-systems as: systems, organs or tissues. At the same time it is a subsystem in relation to the nation, the state and creates a family system of variable structure and level of development (Dąbrowski, 1982). Organic (physiological) life may exist only in the whole organism within the overall system. Isolation of any of the parts of the system, i.e. an organ, introduces a disorder and a disease, and even death. The basis for functioning of the system according to Smith is a dynamic force that consolidates it and keeps it alive.

In the holistic theory the notion of dynamic force that is sometimes replaced by self-control, refers both to the functioning of internal system and its environment. They are not two different environments influencing each other but mutually complementing internal and external forces aiming at maintaining the equilibrium between the organism and the external environment. A man, in order to live, must be in constant interaction with his physical, psychical and social environment. This environment influences the organism permanently but the organism may also change and shape it.

According to Mostvin maintaining of a constant exchange of energy and matter with the environment is possible only when there is no equilibrium which is maintained due to metabolism. Being the subject to changes plays the most important role in the dynamics of maintaining life. Control of changes is realised due to negative and positive feedback which allows for keeping a relative equilibrium in human organism. Introduction of the concept and considering the existence of the dynamics of self-organisation is of fundamental importance for all of the holistic standpoints. This name defines a force

that is not scientifically examined which joins all of the systems, including living organisms. This dynamics of self-organisation decides if the system is the integrated whole that has the properties of not being a simple sum of individual parts of this whole (Dąbrowski, 1989).

One of the important aspects that is emphasised by the holistic theory is maintaining by each holon living in the system of its sub- and supra-systems, a dynamic equilibrium between two opposing tendencies: first – emphasis on own EGO aiming at maintaining individuality, distinction and freedom; second – aspiration for integration and co-operation (Hołyst, 1990).

Both of these tendencies decide about the peculiar equilibrium and interpersonal bond that create self-organisation of human existence.

### HOLISTIC CONCEPT OF HEALTH

During the last decades we have seen a progress in medicine in the development of thinking opposing technological way of approach towards the patient. It is manifested even by treatment of the sick person by restoring him the status of a subject and not only the object of medical interventions. However still the human physical state is “divided” (cit. Skrzypek, 1996) between various specialists - physicians - where each of them deals with different organs but the patient has the right to participate in the process of treatment (Cekiera, 1993).

In the holistic approach health is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes inter-related physical, psychological, social aspects and it cannot be easily separated from the illness. The periods of not getting better are natural stages in the continuously lasting interaction between the individual and the environment. However, for the organism it is important to get adapted to the changes in the environment not only once but it should be the process of continuous adaptation. Before the interpretation of health based on holistic theory was developed there had been many different concepts and orientations defining it. In the present paper two most important concepts of evolutionary perception of health and illness are presented.

### SOCIO-MEDICAL ASPECT OF HEALTH

In the European structure Hypocrites who was considered the “father of European medicine” was one of the first who made order in the overall views on health. According to his ideas well being, i.e. health and feeling bad, i.e. illness, depend on the equilibrium between the environment and us. The external equilibrium between the man and the environment allows for creation of internal balance (Aleksandrowicz, 1968; 1989).

The evaluation of health made by Hypocrites as the category of "feeling good and feeling bad" allows for much subjectivism that narrowed the concept of health to individual feeling and perception of the environment. Objectivity appeared only in the formulation of the dependence of health on the equilibrium between the man and the environment. In man-environment relationship there is a possibility of perceiving health somehow from the outside – its symptoms, features and possible effects which are subjected to evaluation by the other people. The man is a criterion of objectivity in evaluation and formulation of the health potential of himself and the other man. Because behaviours characteristic of feeling good or bad are manifested in relation to the other man (people).

Hypocrite's views on health and illness in unchanged form had been presented until new Cartesian philosophy appeared, the philosophy of mechanical perception of the world and the man (Kulik 1997; Miner, 1981; Popielski, 1995). According to Cartesian theory the human organism was compared to a great machine functioning excellently and precisely. This theory led to recognition of man and his functions, but it made the reaction to man narrowed to a perfect repairing of his health like repairing of the failed biological machine without seeing him as a whole (Popielski, 1995). Perception of man and the world based on Cartesian paradigm led to quick development of the sciences and in medicine – to a great technological progress that allowed for using analytical methods in examining human body and its functions. At the same time there were created scientific foundations for medicine and biomedical concept of health (Aleksandrowicz, 1988; 1989; Hołyst, 1990; Kulik, 1997). It was found that health is influenced by social factors beside biological factors. Here health was realised to be not the only domain of medicine but of many disciplines. There appears a socio-medical concept of health based on the thought of neopositivistic philosophy. According to this concept "a man is first of all a set of elements connected by relatively simple relationships, and the knowledge about each of the elements and each relationship is the knowledge about the man as a whole" (Aleksandrowicz, 1988; 1989; Smith, 1989). In this concept health was perceived as a universal and unambiguous category independently of the influence and changes of the environment.

Health in neopositivistic medicine was a concept not considering illness. It is present as a separate concept treated and defined as the disorder of the correct structure or functioning of the human organism, classified into pathological and clinical units and defined as "International Classification of Diseases, Traumas and Reasons of Deaths". Health is then a condition in which none of pathological units is revealed which are included in that document (Aleksandrowicz, 1988; 1989; Dąbrowski, 1982).

In conclusion, the object of the concern of medicine was the disease because the category of health was considered too difficult to define. So all of the activities in medicine, such as: diagnosis, therapy, rehabilitation, were oriented to fight the disease and struggle for maintaining and extension of life. In such medicine the physicians, so-called "arbiters of the matter" were mainly those who made decisions concerning disease – they had knowledge based on inventions in natural sciences but unilaterally defining the objec-

tive well-being of the patient. Such approach favoured objectivisation and paternalistic treatment of patients (Miner, 1981).

## SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECT OF HEALTH

Introduction of ecology into medicine was the turning point. "The behaviours surrounding the disease" - cit. Titkov - became the subject of examinations. However bio-medical aspects of health became in this orientation one of many indicators for intervention as the essence content of interventions was decided equally by psychological, social and cultural context in which a human being exists. Adoption of such thinking generates also a different image of health by referring – differently than in positivism - to human being and afterwards to phenomena which are their manifestation (Smith 1989). The essence of health should be expressed by two very general concepts: dynamic equilibrium and health potential (Dąbrowski, 1989).

The equilibrium describes a correct state of relationships between individual spheres of man's functioning (physical, psychical, social); interference of the equilibrium of any of these spheres (because of interrelationships) will be also revealed in other spheres. The prerequisite for maintaining equilibrium is health potential characteristic of the man and of his environment.

Hence health is: "a complete physical, psychical and social state of well-being of man and not only the absence of disease or impairment". This is a definition included in the programme of the World Health Organisation. It is an open version and it means that disease is not a static concept that is established once for all but it expresses a current state of medical knowledge in the area of phenomena reflecting pathological processes occurring in human organism (Sokołowska, 1986). The value of life becomes clearly enriched as health means the ability to live sensibly and creatively (productively), which is satisfying for a given man (Bertalanffy, 1991; Dąbrowski, 1989).

Socio-ecological paradigm brought quite a new to socio-medical tradition concept of health promotion, which is defined as the process allowing people for the increased control of their health and the improvement and betterment of their health (Health Promotion 1986). The option of medical care and helping man in his environment has changed as well. Meeting the health needs is realised not only in official medicine, but there is a wide-ranging interest in man. This attention concerns such problems as: self-treatment, activities of social groups (including family), self-assistance oriented towards health of people – the addicted and the handicapped ones; activities of alternative and pro-ecological movements opposing environmental hazards to health.

Socio-ecological concept of health is focused and will be focused on everyday life of total population and not only on people under the risk of disease; it provides and will provide permanent information on health in the context of everyday life; it is focused on factors determining health and requires complete co-operation of various sectors of man-

agement – from the central level to local levels. It is particularly directed towards effective and specific contribution of society in defining health problems (Bertalanffy, 1991).

For the last two years a neotic concept of health has been developed. Its author, the Reverend Prof. Popielski, extends the area of health definition by existential dimension. Suggested multidimensionality of the meaning of health and illness gives opportunities for seeing man through many planes in which he is functioning and living. Illness in this concept is a hazard to health and its potentiality, but at the same time it constitutes an inseparable element of perception and understanding of man, and he himself is treated in this concept as a subject which not only undergoes treatment but participates in it and directs the treatment (Hołyst, 1990).

### HOLISTIC EDUCATION AS THE ALTERNATIVE TO TECHNOLOGISATION OF MEDICINE

Education in medicine is confronted with a difficult dilemma. If it wanted to maintain a leading position in health protection it would have to summon up the effort of extending the viewpoint and also resigning from biomedical perception of the man and the world. It will not be an easy task as the model of biomedical education is a deeply rooted thinking in medicine. It was developed both by professor of medicine and the students. Reductionistic and rational thinking inherited from the Cartesian concept of mechanistic perception of the world is the basis for investigations, publications and research works.

This kind of education refers not only to the discipline itself – medicine, but also to the recipients, i.e. to the society and contemporary patients. Physicians who were taught during their studies to repair human organisms aim at obtaining quick effects of treatment by using frequently means disproportionate in relation to the needs (Kulik, 1997).

We live then at the time when contemporary attempts of switching from biomedical to holistic model of medicine encounter difficulties (problems) and resistance. However they are clear activities as complete rejection of medical achievements, even those reductional, cannot be suggested. Holism must encompass and include also priceless achievements of reparable medicine and create conditions for its humanisation. Permanent changes must be introduced in medical education. It should consider the achievements of the Humanities, mainly psychology, sociology and pedagogy which developed effective techniques of influencing the man. These sciences should be the sources for developing work organisation and particularly for team work that will create opportunities for equality of rights to everyone in the continuously growing team. As with present treatment conditions the patient will be interested in participation (Miner, 1981).

In holistic education such domains of medicine should be exposed as health promotion and prophylactics, so they are the activities considered nowadays the most effective in counteracting biological degradation of the societies, prevention of social diseases and

protecting life to its full extent from the birth till the natural death. Here I would like to put forward a question concerning the future of medicine and the direction of education. At the end of the 70's the co-author of European medicine, a nurse, a physician and a sociologist – Prof. M. Sokołowska, wrote: "future medicine will depend on people. After a great scientific-technological development there certainly will be turn towards the development of humanism also in medicine". It is a fact that recently there has been an increased interest in paraclinical disciplines, such as environmental medicine which is oriented ecologically and focused on risk factors and also on the style of living and social medicine as well as public health. The listed domains of medicine have their place in the educational programme of students in Medical Universities in Poland.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Zdrowiem i jego uwarunkowaniami zajmuje się obok medycyny wiele nauk społecznych: pedagogika, psychologia, socjologia, a ostatnio także ekologia. W ramach tych nauk została wypracowana nowa koncepcja zdrowia – koncepcja systemowo-holistyczna. Pozwala ona na bardziej dokładne śledzenie zmian, jakie zachodzą u człowieka w procesie rozwoju, a także na głęboką refleksję nad efektywnością profilaktyki w tym procesie. Jest wyrazem poszukiwania przez medycynę i nauki społeczne nowych dróg wiodących do poprawy zdrowotności społeczeństw, a zarazem symptomem jej przemian, przechodzenia od „ery medycznej” do „postmedycznej”, której głównym założeniem jest np. przeniesienie ciężaru gatunkowego walki o zdrowie z instytucji medycznych na instytucje życia społecznego i indywidualne zachowania jednostek. Obok tych treści w pracy przedstawiono również historyczną ewolucję zdrowia poprzez tworzenie jego paradygmatów.