

HEALING PAIN

The Cure is in the Pain

Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.



The cure for the pain is in the pain.

~ Jellaludin Rumi

We're a culture that medicates our pain. We medicate our physical pain. We medicate our emotional pain. And our medicine may not necessarily be of the pharmaceutical sort. It may be workaholism. It may be other “medicines” that distract us from sensations and feelings, like food, substances, relationships. Even addiction to yoga. (I've been there.)

But in medicating our various pains, we make it impossible to ever heal them.

As Rumi, the Sufi mystic poet offered, “*The cure for the pain is in the pain.*”

All physical pain has an emotional component. Addressing this emotional component can relieve and even heal our physical pain. And emotional pain, while profoundly real for all of us, finds its cause in our misunderstanding and misuse of the mind.

These notions are firmly rooted in the ancient global healing traditions, find concurrence in the lineage of contemporary Western medicine, and now find firm footing in the wide body

of scientific research supporting the veracity of thoughts and feelings as potent mediators of health outcomes.

Every non-Western healing system understands the ineffable oneness of mind and body, the intimate relationship between thoughts and feelings and physical health.

In the traditions of Chinese medicine and Ayurveda, for example, emotions and bodily symptoms are linked. Chinese medicine considers there to be seven emotions: joy, anger, sadness, grief, anxiety, fright and terror. Disease results if any one of these is in excess. Sadness and grief are linked to the lung; anger, frustration and irritability, to the liver; worry, fear and rumination, to the kidney. Of all of these emotions, anger is thought to be a primary cause of disease. Cancers and tumors are thought to be caused by repressed anger.

In Ayurveda, disease is caused by *ama*, or toxicity. Repressed emotions can generate *ama*. Similar relationships are seen between specific feelings and the physical body. Here again, anger is a powerful player – it can cause inflammation of any kind, and will eventually lead to disease.

Even the forefathers of Western medicine believed this — that our thoughts, attitudes and feelings impact our health. Hippocrates spoke of the links between mind, body and soul, and of the importance of treating the person who has the disease, not the disease that person has.

As a practitioner, I have witnessed these relationships in my work. As a physician who has also been a patient, I've experienced them personally.

Mindbody medicine is now lending credence to these ancient constructs, and in particular, in the arena of pain. Brain imaging studies have shown that perceptions of anger, anxiety and pain travel along the same neural pathways, and that when acute pain becomes chronic, it no longer activates a primary pain processing area, but rather, an area of the brain involved in processing emotions. And it's been demonstrated that emotional memories can elicit physical pain: remembering an event that has caused physical pain can elicit that pain, even in the absence of the physical cause.

Here's the take home message: emotions affect physical pain and physical pain affects emotions. Anxiety and anger can elicit and worsen physical pain, and physical pain can elicit feelings of anxiety and anger. And healing our feelings can heal our pain.

Clinical studies have demonstrated just this: the links between feelings and physical pain and the efficacy of mindbody medicine practices for managing both emotions and physical pain. Research has shown that mindfulness meditation, expressive writing and somatic sensing, just to name a few, have beneficial effects on managing both uncomfortable feeling states such as anger and anxiety, as well as palliating physical pain. In other words, **the cure for the pain is in the pain.**

Being here now, being with what is, cultivating presence – being with our pain – is the way to shift things.

I'll also offer a personal share: As a fellow-journeyer who has experienced the pain of both sorts, and in my work with others, I've born witness to healing both physical and emotional pain through the power of presence. I've seen how **being with the pain can shift the pain.** Mind-body practices, such as breathing, mindfulness and meditation, journaling, and body-sensing exercises, as well as energy medicine techniques like EFT – Emotional Freedom Technique – and body-centered practices, have offered powerful and sometimes even instantaneous healing.

However, we physicians are still taught to medicate the pain of both sorts. The ancient wisdom and even this good science have yet to trickle down into our clinical practice. We have a fragmented medical system that views the parts more readily than the whole, promotes specialization over integration, and considers matters of the mind and psyche to be solely the realm of psychiatry. And we're not taught to read the literature of specialties and disciplines other than our own. Hence, there is little cross fertilization of ideas and inquiry. And thus, we're taught to medicate the pain. We're just not so good at offering more than medicine.

For do-it-yourself tools to experience a path to freedom, to liberation from pain of both sorts — physical and emotional — check out my e-books: [*Healing from the Inside Out*](#) and [*The Healing Power of Forgiveness*](#).

Finally, before I close, let me just add one important note: if you're suffering from physical pain of any sort, by all means, get a diagnosis. That pain is a sign that something's amiss. It may very well be healed by the power of presence, and by healing the emotional links, but there may be something else going on that needs addressing. Whatever it is, being with it is the first step on the path to healing it. A practitioner and a diagnosis can be your partner on that path to healing.

Hoping you found this little e-book interesting and helpful.

As always, I welcome your feedback.

Patricia A. Muehsam, M.D.
TRANSFORMATIONAL MEDICINE™
A Whole Person Approach to Healing, Wellness and Living
www.transformationalmedicine.org
transformationalmedicine@gmail.com
212-946-5700

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