

The Principles of Anthroposophic Medicine

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In the early 1900s, Rudolf Steiner, born in Austria, gave voice to the principles of reality underlying human freedom. He called this body of work 'Anthroposophy.' Out of this philosophic base grew initiatives for cultural renewal, including Anthroposophic Medicine, Waldorf Education, Camphill Communities for the handicapped, and Biodynamic Agriculture.

The medical work – developed through medical doctor Dr. Ita Wegman and Rudolf Steiner working together – seeks to complement existing medical practices, and is founded on scientific practices.

The human being contains four systems or bodies, not just the one physical body commonly recognized. The eternal individuality is the spiritual make-up, and is named the ego or self. The soul qualities are the emotional make-up, named the astral body. The life forces form a system of vitality within the physical body, and this system is named the ether body. The physical body is what we recognize with our physical eyes. The wisdom contained within these systems is that with which nature was created. This picture of the human being forms the foundation of the holistic medical approach named 'Anthroposophic Medicine.' The four-fold picture of the human being is in contrast to the current conventional picture of the human being as a machine (mechanistic), which understates the reality and potential of the human being.

To obtain knowledge, one works with one's thinking, to observe perceptions and recognizes what stands around (context) or behind them. This is in contrast to the type of knowledge found in modern reductionistic science. This new way of working with knowledge, made precise by Rudolf Steiner, remains to be developed in the practice of medicine and science.

The ego or self of the human being – the eternal individuality – unfolds its individual destiny in freedom, learning sometimes through error and illness. The anthroposophic practitioner always endeavors to approach a patient with reverence for the individual, and his or her destiny.

Substance is the path of the physician, and the anthroposophic medical doctor commonly uses low potency homeopathic remedies, and herbs, orally or by injection, or by external application. In addition, diet, rhythm, warmth, nutritional supplements play an important role in the physician's work. Each anthroposophic medical doctor must have full conventional medical qualifications (eg, MD or DO), and conventional pharmaceuticals may be prescribed when needed.

Anthroposophic physicians commonly work with anthroposophic therapists, who are specially trained in a variety of different therapies which are based on movement, color, sound – capacities of the archetypal human experience. Anthroposophic therapies include a unique form of movement therapy (therapeutic eurythmy), art therapy (painting therapy or music therapy or therapeutic speech), rhythmical massage therapy, hydrotherapy, or anthroposophic nursing. New forms of psychological understanding are emerging out of this picture of the human being resulting in treatment approaches.