

Medical Flat Earthers

The Gold Standard of medical science, we are all told, is the double blind controlled trial.

It is this test that all therapeutic systems and methods are supposed to pass in order to be accepted as valid and worthy of financing or research funding. Recently a certain Professor Ernst of Exeter University department of complementary medicine has proclaimed “Homoeopathy doesn’t work, there is no scientific evidence that it does”. Here is a well-educated intellectual man who represents a fine example of what might be termed “medical flat earthers”. Over the past years we have heard similar pronouncements against all the traditional natural therapies, against all those “foolish“ people who claimed they were helping the sick and dying with their “unproven” therapies.

However after a thorough and lengthy investigation by the House of Lords Science & Technology working party, all the mainstream CAM therapies were given a guarded acknowledgement that they truly contributed to the health and healing of patients. A second group of therapies were not dismissed but given a positive recognition that they offered benefit to patients but needed more research to understand how they did this. This was indeed a positive step towards a better philosophy of the healing arts, a significant shift in the old mechanistic paradigm. Even this group were, by the nature of the times, working under the conceptual rules and constraints of the modern medical paradigm which included the double blind trial and the usual model of “man and what makes him tick”.

There are three main faults in this modern scientific medical view. These faults are so great as to put the whole future development of medicine and healthcare in grave danger, the health and lives of all patients in peril, the economic and social wealth of nations at risk and our future survival in question. What then could these faults be that are so vital yet have not been banner headlines in our press over the past years? Individually they may not seem that significant but when working together they form the elements that could provide the disintegration forces of our lives.

The first we shall term “ faulty model of man”, the second “faulty application of this model” and the third “ faulty economics of healthcare”. Imagine that it wasn’t generally known that we live in a three dimensional world, that we believed everything went on in our lives on a flat surface, there were north south east and west, backwards and forwards, left and right but no up and down. Our scientists would develop trials and tests based on this model of the world and all new concepts would be put through these trials. Any system which required the third dimension for its validation would automatically be denounced as beyond scientific possibility, no rational explanation, and any benefits that the system demonstrated in practice would be put down to “placebo effects” or by chance only. To try to point out that what makes people special is their ability to stand upright and walk tall would be seen as scientific heresy or madness since

“everyone” knows we all crawl around flat on the ground! Whole medical systems would be developed to help the sick so they felt better crawling over the earth, anyone complaining they felt they ought to be upright and feeling depressed because they weren’t would be given appropriate drugs to ward off these aberrant sensations. To be fair, within its constraints, this system would work well and life would go on in some basic way. There would always be a nagging doubt about this lack of “up and down” this imagined “heaven and hell”, there would be occasional outbursts of dissatisfaction with the flatness of life, but most would put this down to just the fact that the real world was just like that and they should come to accept it as it is and get on with their lives or “move on” as we are wont to say these days. Groups of folk unwilling to accept there could be no better life, develop ideas of this “other world” and little by little have great numbers of followers who claim to believe in a better world in which we could all move in all directions and where we would all walk tall with our heads held high and filled with a sense of wonder. They are persecuted, by the established thinkers or dismissed as misguided simpletons needing better teaching. At times the establishment may adopt one or other of these “three dimensionist’s” belief systems if it suits their needs to maintain control over their subjects, but they are only paying lip service to these ideas and that the reality is as always flatness. So it doesn’t have much impact on life and the way society develops.

Some will, by now, have recognised the problems that beset the flat earthers are the very problems that challenge us today. If we demand the only accepted reality is one that says all knowledge is already known, there can be no other unknowns of any consequence, life is as it is demonstrated to be, simply a piece of superb serendipity, an inevitable outcome of an infinite number of chance events over an infinite time span, a hugmonstrous happenstance, a simply “is” or a most beautiful concoction of mindless atoms, then what we have is much the same as our amusing flat earthers. The dangers arise when anyone dares to suggest an alternative scenario; trying to conceive the unknown is a hazardous task. Anyone in the “real” world will be able to demolish any concept on the simple basis that it is not proven by our current science, therefore cannot be. Is this because the belief is wrong, or that the current science is inadequate for the task?

Many are now suggesting we need to broaden our science to be better able to encompass the present unknowns. This happens easily in the field of particle physics, cosmology, and all the frontiers of material science. Why has this not happened in the field of the nonmaterial sciences? It is here that the flat earthers are holding back man’s scientific advances, they are forcing every life experience, observation and phenomenon into the straightjacket of old material scientific thinking, they have even failed to use the latest material science in their depressing efforts to destroy such heresy.

Over a century has passed since one of the great thinkers of this era tried to meet this challenge, to somehow bring the precision and critical power of

scientific thinking and research to help us bridge the divide between the material observable and measurable and the immaterial unseen and unmeasurable. Rudolf Steiner was the intellectual and spiritual giant who gave the world a personal glimpse of how we might achieve this task. This is without doubt the greatest and most worthy challenge for the 21st century. If we fail to meet it, the future is bleak for mankind. If we make some faltering steps in the right directions we may discover this world is not so flat as we have been led to believe! Rudolf Steiner used the expression “spiritual science” to describe this melding of all knowledge and wisdom, the seen and unseen, the measurable and the immeasurable, the here and now and the timeless and infinite, the earthly and the cosmic. Few, if any, have attempted such an awesome task since. He did not lay down a blueprint, some immutable formula or some recipe to be followed by others. No, he offered his own thoughts and inspiration to help kindle the light within us all that occasionally glistens like the seam of gold in the dross of dull rock. We cannot measure love, kindness, sympathy, grief, fear and hate, but all sane people know these things are as real as metal and stone. These things and many more that involve imagination, inspiration, and greater awareness, are not only real but perhaps should be regarded as the foundations of reality in life and the universe.

Then there is the faulty application of our modern medical model. The double blind trial standard reminds me of the Alice in Wonderland idea in Economics; that “the demand for pigs depends on the price of pigs” (*Ceteris Paribus*) or in the vernacular if everything else in the world stays the same!! The reality is it doesn't! The other criticism of the trial system is that it is only applied when the fancy takes us. The vast majority of surgical procedures are not subject to it, nor are the majority of non-drug treatment regimes of doctors. Perhaps a touch of good common sense has been behind this anomaly, trying to subject the infinite variations of practical therapeutics with the uniqueness of each patient would not lend itself to “double blind trials”. So, why are all CAM therapies to be so judged? Could this be a desperate attempt to keep power and right in the hands of the established medical hierarchy?

Let us try to develop some more substantial trial system that can work with such complex therapeutic systems rather than force a simplistic measuring tool on them. When we do find such a system it will help improve all forms of healthcare including surgery, general practice, nursing and CAM. Of course we will first have to agree on what constitutes a successful outcome for our patients! While ever this is restricted to survival rates or suppression of symptoms we will not make much progress. It will have to incorporate the concept of health and well being, of patient happiness and peace, of individual, family, community and world health.

Then finally we must address “Faulty economics of healthcare”. Medicine is now dominated by the big commercial interests, health for all is no longer the common aspiration and challenge. It has been replaced by governments trying to keep health costs down by prioritising the treatment of disease to the detriment of

funding to health enhancing schemes, by drug companies increasingly directing the medical profession through their advertising and selective research work to generate higher profits as they ought by any commercial standards, by a collusion between doctors and patients, one offering easy pill popping solutions according to the diagnosis, the others demanding easy pill popping solutions that don't demand any personal lifestyle changes or efforts on their own account.

Once health care is replaced by disease treatment we descend into a deadly downward spiral of increasing individual and social sickness and a simultaneous rising spiral of escalating costs to society both in the cost of medication and treatment and the cost of increasing loss of active life for all.

The simple analogy of a modern society that did not require us to check and ensure our cars were safe and roadworthy would lead to increased breakdowns, accidents would increase, garages would be overloaded with work, our roads would be cluttered with broken down cars that were waiting recovery.....this is where we are in our modern medical healthcare system.

We are not, as we are frequently reassured we are, at the high pinnacle of medical brilliance with ever increasing health for all, the truth could not be further from this. We are at a point of imminent collapse of an overburdened, over resourced, overgrown disease control and management system that has sacrificed the fundamentals of healthcare for blind trust in the next "magic bullet". As another giant in the medical world, Professor Konstantin Buteyko, once remarked that modern medicine has no philosophy, but is driven by "blind empiricism".

Must we continue through these Dark Ages of Medicine allowing the old flat earthers to dominate our thinking? Or dare we be courageous enough to acknowledge our ignorance and lack of understanding of the world beyond our normal senses and try to incorporate it into a broader scientific model of health and medicine which will allow us to make more rational statements about the validity or otherwise of any therapy, CAM or orthodox?

A dawn of a New Age of Enlightenment might be within our grasp if we are courageous enough to leave our prejudices and fears behind.

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