

Treat the Patient, not the Disease

by Charley Cropley, N.D.

"I consulted and worked with Charley as a patient of his in 2010 and felt that his philosophy of care resonated nicely with that of HT Program. I invited him to share some of his knowledge and wisdom about holistic health care and naturopathic principles with our HTP Energy Magazine community through reprints of some of his seminal articles. We will be offering a series of his articles on health in the next few issues of EM. Thank you for sharing with us Charley!" – Cynthia Hutchison

It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has. ~Hippocrates

One of the five core principles of Naturopathic Medicine is "Treat the patient, not the disease." What does this mean? To me it means that my primary focus is not your weight, your "disease" or your hormonal levels, although all of these merit their due consideration and care. It means that, with few exceptions, nothing can impact your health as profoundly and certainly as you, the patient, can through the ways you use and care for your body and mind. Whether you are overweight or diagnosed with colitis, diabetes or any other disorder the most powerful source of healing you will find is you, yourself.

Specifically I am referring to the way you eat, exercise, think and communicate. These activities are the dominant influences

on your anatomy and physiology. Every structure and function of your body is affected by these actions - the composition of your blood and lymph, hormonal balance, brain chemistry, immunity, bones - you name it. If your actions are abnormal, they cause your physiology to become abnormal.

Interestingly this core self-healing work remains substantially the same for you, as an individual, regardless of your diagnosis. Whether your illness involves migraines, arthritis or infertility, your core healing work will be essentially the same. You will still need to correct your own errors in eating, exercise, thinking and communicating. Conversely five different clients with the same diagnosis would each find their program of self-healing to be unique to them -- one emphasizing nutrition, a second spinal misalignment, another chronic anxiety.

Your power to heal such processes as inflammation, hormonal balance and brain chemistry is identical to the power you have to control your daily actions. The wisdom with which you govern your appetite, posture, thoughts and emotions IS the very power that controls your unconscious bodily processes such as digestion, reproduction etc. By performing your most ordinary daily activities with love and intelligence you will find that your body becomes an expression of this.

This approach - which I call "Self-Healing" - is absolutely practical. It takes the mystery out of Healing and puts the power directly in your own hands. Not only is it immediately accessible to everyone, it is actually inescapable. Everyone already eats, moves, thinks and communicates. The only question is whether

or not we perform these vital functions wisely and caringly. There are no escaping the results, for better or for worse.

The most important thing I teach my students is how to wield their power to self-heal. Are you incapable of resisting a cup of coffee or a dessert? Are you unskillful in directing your thoughts away from anger or anxiety? Do you allow your actions to be governed by whatever feels pleasant or painful in the moment? Observe the confidence, intelligence, and kindness with which you direct your most ordinary actions. By these actions you feed, rest and exercise your body. By the thoughts you have, do you stimulate your mind with irresistible desires and terrifying fears or with a passion for Health through right action? It is you on whom your body and mind depend.

You are your own master. Who else? Nobody else can eat, exercise, or think for you. There is absolutely no possibility of escaping the consequences of your actions - both for better and for worse. Reflecting deeply on the inviolability of Natural law has been perhaps the greatest impetus for me to take better care of myself. I instruct and encourage my students to develop the practice of contemplating the universal law of justice or fair compensation. "As you give, so shall you receive." It alerts you to the fact that your actions matter -- supremely.

Let us examine one example of the incomparable power you possess for Self-Healing; the power of hunger. Just as you train a horse to plow a field or a dog to guard your children, you can harness the animal power of hunger. Hunger when trained and befriended will devour bacteria, viruses and weakened, sick tissue. Hunger is a fierce, wild animal power, which, when wielded with love, will defend your body against almost everything.

However, if you allow your body to behave like an uncontrolled animal and eat whatever and whenever it wants - it becomes weak, lazy and incapable of defending your precious home. Think of how much personal power it takes for you to stop drinking coffee or sweets, let alone to fast for a day. This is precisely the power that you can learn to harness to purify and strengthen your body. You will learn to channel the power you now squander in short term pleasures for the restoration of all

your bodily structures and functions be it reproduction, digestion or circulation.

Movement is another means by which you can infuse your body with love and intelligence. Imagine pausing 30 seconds to bring poise to your posture, to breathe fully into your body, and say to it, "This is for you. I am with you, I love you." Imagine that for 20 minutes each morning you infuse your body with such kind attention through conscious exercise.

For numerous reasons our scientific community has only minimally studied and documented our human powers of self-healing. I appreciate the contribution western science has made to my understanding of healing. However, I did not learn to heal myself by reading scientific journals. I have been more influenced by the fathers of Naturopathic Medicine, herbalism, homeopathy, psychotherapy, yoga and especially the saints and teachers of various spiritual traditions. Therefore, I explain to my clients how healing works in the ways it was taught to me -- ways that are a blend of science, philosophy, metaphor and common sense.

Most of my clients find that their illness makes more sense when understood as a natural way that their body or a specific organ is actually communicating to them. The body asks much like a baby asks for milk or a flower for water. Its asking begins gently and increases in intensity. The demands of Nature can never silenced. It is supremely important that we heed the voice of our body's wisdom speaking to us in the universal language of illness.

We innocently may not have fully grasped the incomparable benefits or miseries consequent upon our listening and caring. Illness teaches us to listen and obey our body's needs. It motivates us to seek and embrace what truly benefits us and to eschew short term pleasures that end in suffering.

I teach my students to interpret their illness as priceless guidance coming to them from the Universe. Harsh but invaluable instruction, 100% personalized to YOU. The same diagnosis or symptoms in another person would carry completely different instructions for how to improve one's life.

As students makes this perceptual shift from viewing their illness as something foreign and destructive to seeing it as highly personal and caring instruction, their interest moves away from trying to cure their “disease.” They become keenly interested in understanding themselves and what it means to truly care for themselves. Now we are treating the patient, not their disease.

About the author:



Dr. Charley Cropley graduated from National College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1979.

He has been a practicing Naturopathic Physician, teacher and author in the Boulder/Denver area for the last 25 years. He has trained hundreds of doctors in his methods

of nutrition and Self-Healing. He is the author of numerous articles, several books and an array of audios and videos. He has been a frequent lecturer at the colleges of Naturopathic Medicine, and is widely regarded as one of today’s leading thinkers and teachers in the philosophy and practice of Self-Healing.

Dr. Cropley no longer prescribes any medicines. He teaches his “students” to Heal their Health problems by strengthening their Self-control and using this in four areas: Wholesome nutrition, strengthening exercise, positive thinking and developing honest, caring relationships. His students learn how to master their illnesses by mastering themselves. He practices what he teaches.

For Personal Appts, DVDs, books or classes call 303-442-6161 or Health@charley-cropley.com.