

II. Naturopathic Principle: Healing Power of Nature (*vis edicatrix naturae*)

Origin:

The concept of *vis medicatrix naturae* started with the Corpus Hippocraticum in 400 BC. The study of medicine, at that time, was based on the observation of nature and nature was the force to restore health and balance in humans. The task of the physician was, to support nature in that path. One of the main statements was: “*Medicus curat, natura sanat*”.

In the Aphorism of the Corpus Hippocraticum it says:

“The natural healing power (*vis*), which stimulates the material, the inner warmth implanted in the body, is the reason and source of his life.”⁽⁴⁷⁾

- **Paracelsus** (1493-1541) a Swiss philosopher and physician stated about the healing power of nature:

“Life is governed by a self-regulating and self-healing intelligence; its function is to assimilate healthy material into organism and defend it against invasions from outside. Seated in the stomach; likened to fire.”⁽²⁰⁾

Around 1850 there was a divide in medicine between the traditional medical practitioners and those that were embracing science and technology. The traditional practitioners maintained that the *vis medicatrix naturae* was the central concept or law of health; those that embraced science and technology went on to form what is known as conventional medicine.^(48, 49) It is not that traditional medical practices, like naturopathic are not science based, it is that they still hold the original concepts of health and healing as core to their foundation and practice.

Description:

The term *vis medicatrix naturae* denotes the body's ability to heal itself. This healing power is an inherent self-organizing, ordered healing process of living

systems which establishes, maintains and restores health. The *vis medicatrix naturae* has been referred to an extension of creator consciousness or cosmic consciousness.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Although nature doctors, including naturopathic doctors, have been the greatest champions of this doctrine, the mystery surrounding the *healing power of the body* was part of medicine since the beginning of time. The medical historian, Max Neuburger stated. “there are innate or natural laws surrounding life, health and disease. These laws involve man living in harmony with nature and recognizing the wisdom of the body to heal itself.”⁽⁵¹⁾

The concept of the *vis medicatrix naturae* is Universal and incorporates the traditional beliefs in many world regions. Among New Zealand Maori (indigenous peoples of New Zealand) the healing power of nature is referred to as “*Te oranga mai te taiao*” which means “reliance on the natural processes and life-forces to heal”. The term *taiao* indicates nature. *Tai* is translated as ‘the waters or the sea’, which indicates the land’s boundaries (the coast). *Ao* indicates ‘the world, the earth’. *Oranga* is pertaining to welfare. It derives from the word *ora*, which could be translated as ‘of the sun’ (*ra* being the sun), the source of all life. The term *wai ora* is also often used. The Maori word ‘*wai*’, while it also translates as water, also refers to the spirit (*wairua*). *Wai* evokes a flow and ‘*ora*’ means the life force. This term is evocative of the flowing life force within us, which is none other than that which flows through all nature, all creation. Thus, nature is seen as the force of healing, be it the waters, the sun, the earth our own vital force. In this sense naturopathy cannot be divorced from the environment around us.

Humans are part of that environment and it is part of the human being, in that environmental influences affect the cellular make-up of the human being.⁽⁵²⁾

As the focus is on facilitating the endemic healing within a person, it is the naturopaths / naturopathic doctor's role to support, facilitate and augment the *vis medicatrix naturae* process by identifying and removing obstacles to health and recovery, by supporting the creation of a healthy internal and external environment and ensuring that the mind is acting towards wellbeing.⁽⁸⁾ A naturopathic belief is that symptoms are often the manifestation of the body's

attempt to defend and heal itself. When the root cause of the symptoms and the obstacles to cure are identified, and addressed the body will often be able to initiate the healing process on its own. With lifestyle changes, the use of natural therapies, such as herbs, foods, water, fasting and tissue manipulation, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, or the healing power of the body, is supported.⁽¹⁷⁾

Examples of the *vis medicatrix naturae*:

- you cut a finger and wound automatically starts to heal;
- fever is a natural response to a pathogen, flu or virus;
- vomiting or diarrhea are the body's way of responding to food poisoning;
- fractures, when aligned, heal often on their own; and
- after major surgeries or treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiation, the body will initiate healing.

Naturopaths seek to harness the organism's own natural healing energies, by applying therapies that are in harmony with nature and in harmony with the needs of the patient. While this is the ideal, it is acknowledged that, at times, naturopaths need to override the natural processes to preserve health, as in surgery, or severe infection, where methods that are directly contrary to the natural processes are applied.⁽⁴¹⁾

Naturopaths / naturopathic doctors apply the *vis medicatrix naturae* by:

- Treating the patient; not the disease;
- Removing obstacles to healing by identifying and treating the cause of disease;
- Decreasing the toxic load to allow the innate healing ability to come through;
- Directing the *vital force* to stimulate the body's own defences and healing ability; and
- Decreasing a person's susceptibility to disease.⁽⁴¹⁾

Contributors to the Healing Power of Nature (*vis medicatrix naturae*)

The *vis medicatrix naturae* is considered one of the most important naturopathic

principles. Many practitioners have written about and explored this concept over the years including:

- **C. W. Hufeland** (1762-1836) said about the healing power of nature:

“The truth of health can be found in the *vis medicatrix naturae*, *vis natura regeneratrix* and in *vital force*.”⁽⁵³⁾

In his book “*Lehrbuch der Allgemeinen Heilkunde*” (1818) he stated about the healing power of nature:

“The human body has not only the capacity to maintain his own and his life, but also to resolve disorders and wrong conditions. The nature itself is able to cure diseases. Innumerable people have already been restored in this way, without all the aid of the art of healing, and they are still daily. The doctrine of the healing power of nature deserves our greatest attention, because this natural effect is attended to in every way, even in artificial healing. Yes, there are diseases, which we have to leave alone to this treatment.”⁽⁵⁴⁾

- **Russel Thacker Trall** (1812-1877, North America. Trall was a promoter of vegetarian diet, hydrophathy and self-healing power of nature. Trall opened in 1844 the first “Water Cure Centre” in N.Y. city, in 1847 Trall founded the “Hygienic Institute N.Y.” and in 1852 he opened the “Hydrophathic and Physiological School”. One of his statements was:

“...we must never forget that Nature is the true physician.”⁽⁵⁵⁾

He has contributed an important part to health promotion. was a pioneer of the natural health movement in the United States. He stated that every time an action is carried out in the living organism as a consequence of external influences, the action must be attributed to the living, which has the power to act. Trall contributed to the *vis* the following: “Nature is the remedial principle”⁽⁵⁶⁾ That means, that it is not the remedy or the treatment the physician applies, that restores health, but the nature in humans – the *vis medicatrix naturae*.

- **Henry Lindlahr, ND, MD (1862-1924)** was born in Germany and helped by Father Kneipp in a health problem. He went to the US, studied medicine and became a famous naturopath and hydrotherapist. He quoted about the *vis medicatrix naturae*:

“It is this supreme power and intelligence, acting in and through every atom, molecule and cell in the human body, which is the true healer, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, which always endeavours to repair, to heal and to restore obstructions and to establish normal conditions within and around the patient, so that the healer within can do his work to the best advantage.”⁽⁴²⁾

- **William A. Mitchell, Jr., ND (1947-2007)**, was an American naturopathic doctor, teacher and philosopher and taught at various naturopathic colleges throughout North America during the past 30 years. He stated about the *Vis*:

“The *Vis* is not weakened or strengthened by the strength of the individual. The *vis medicatrix naturae* exists internally and universally. The “*Vis*” is an equation. The result of the harmonious balanced functioning of all systems at all levels. Values in the equation can change, thus affect how strong an individual is, or how long an individual lives . . . but the law of nature simply exists. The level of vitality of any part of the equation can change, however, the *Vis* is the equation itself.”⁽⁵⁷⁾

- **Roger Newman Turner, ND, DO**, an English naturopath, teacher and author quoted:

“The *Vis* at work is an inherent, purposive process of restoring normality in the body that is fundamentally the same whatever the challenge.”⁽⁵⁸⁾

- **John Arthur Thomson (1861-1933)** was a Scottish naturalist whose clearly written books on biology and attempts to correlate science and religion led to wider public awareness of progress in the biological sciences. He stated, that

healing is the mindful contact with the animate and inanimate natural portions of the outdoor environment.

"What then do I mean tonight by the healing power of nature? I mean to refer to the way in which Nature ministers to our minds, all more or less diseased by the rush and racket of civilization, and helps to steady and enrich our lives. My first point is that there are deeply-rooted, old established, far-reaching relations between Man and Nature which we cannot ignore without loss... there would be less "psychopathology of everyday life" if we kept up our acquaintance... we have put ourselves beyond a very potent *vis medicatrix naturae* if we cease to be able to wonder at the grandeur of the star-strewn sky, the mystery of the mountains, the sea eternally new, the way of the eagle in the air, the meanest flower that blows, the look in a dog's eye."⁽⁵⁹⁾

- **Joe Pizzorno, ND** from the United States, is a naturopathic physician, educator, researcher and expert spokesperson. He is the founding president of Bastyr University. Pizzorno says about the *Vis*:

"*Vis medicatrix naturae* is the manifestation of the universal Consciousness in biological form. Our environment, beliefs, interactions with others, actions, lifestyle, diet, etc. modulate the manifestation of the *Vis* as our vitality, but *Vis* itself is immutable. As we harmonize with the *Vis*, our consciousness expands."⁽⁶⁰⁾

- **Foundations of Naturopathic Medicine Project** is an international collaboration of more than 200 authors. They state about the *Vis*:

"*Vis medicatrix naturae* is the equation; natural law & complex system of healing. *Vis medicatrix naturae* is based in and affected by a unified field created through both

upward and downward causation originating in Spirit. This natural law behavior can be observed through phenomena of traditional laws of healing (eg: dual effect, similars, unity of disease and cure, sevens, suppression, healing reaction, therapeutic order, Hering's Rules. etc). It may be called the healing power and process of nature. Both consciousness and material inputs affect the *Vis medicatrix naturae*. Vis = life force. Vital force and life force may be the same. The vital force is not the same as *Vis medicatrix naturae*. The vital force powers the *Vis medicatrix naturae* within the human organism.”⁽⁶¹⁾

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