

III. Naturopathic Principle: Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*)

Origin

Although the number of factors that have been identified to contribute to both health and disease has grown exponentially, **the Corpus Hippocraticum** first highlighted the importance of identifying and treating the cause(s) of disease with the following quote:

“The causes of diseases are: 1. inner dispositions,
2. wrong way of life, 3. climate and habitat.”⁽³⁶⁾

Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) stated about *tolle causam*:

“The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patient in the care of the human frame, in proper diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease.”⁽⁶²⁾

There have been a number of theories contributing to the principle Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*), including: Humoral Theory⁽³⁶⁾, Theory of Toxaemia⁽⁶³⁾ and Unity of Disease.⁽⁴²⁾

Description

Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*) is a principle that stresses the importance of identifying and treating the cause(s) of disease. It is based on the realization that health and disease are logical; they happen for a reason.⁽⁸⁾

Identifying the root cause of disease and the aggravating factors is an essential aspect of naturopathic care. Nowadays there are just more factors. As part of the therapeutic encounter, a naturopath / naturopathic doctor explores a range of factors that impact health and disease including: genetics, lifestyle, social, environmental, external and medical interventions.⁽⁸⁾ The naturopathic understanding is that health is improved by reducing the number of factors that strain the body and interfere with its normal functioning and ability to heal. Naturopathic treatment involves teaching patients that a return to a more simple and health promoting lifestyle is the best medicine.⁽⁴¹⁾

Identifying and treating the root cause of disease does not imply a linear causality between events in a person's life and disease. Human beings are a complex, dynamic and integrated system and it is the accumulation of multiple factors that contribute to health and disease. For example, a specific event might be the primary trigger that initiated or amplified a series of symptoms, but a person's overall state of health, their resiliency, adherence to lifestyle factors that are suited to their constitution, the impact of environmental factors, the support of family and community etc, all play a role in their ability to handle disrupting factors and stressful situations.⁽⁸⁾ The complex workings of the body follows the concept of mutual causality and recognizes that the impact of any specific event is contextual and individual.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Treat the Cause refers to the need to look beneath and beyond symptoms, into the deeper origins and reason(s) for susceptibility to illness and to manage individuals using methods that enable susceptibilities to be addressed.⁽⁸⁾ Fever provides a cogent example to illustrate such a complex approach. Fever, rather than being a disease, is a symptom of disease. In a sense it could be called a 'positive symptom' in that it is a normal physiological response to infection.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Other examples of 'positive symptoms' could include: vomiting in food poisoning (where the body attempts to get rid of the noxious matter); diarrhoea, also in food poisoning (where the elimination occurs at the opposite end of the digestive tract).⁽⁶⁶⁾

In order to treat the causes of symptoms, it is important to understand not only the physiology and pathology for each person, but to understand the emotional states and how a person thinks about health and disease.⁽⁸⁾ The aim of a naturopathic assessment is to determine the specific trigger, situation, environment factor or behaviour that initiated the disruption and that needs to be addressed.⁽²⁴⁾

The body naturally compensates whenever the internal functioning is overwhelmed. This compensation shows up as symptoms and as a disruption to health. Symptoms are viewed as expressions of the body's natural attempt to heal. The body is complex and yet logical. It displays symptoms that provide a road map to the root cause. For example, when the kidney or liver is overwhelmed it is common for an individual to develop skin conditions. The location of the skin conditions will provide a guide as to the organ that is stressed.⁽⁶⁷⁾

There are times when the physical manifestation of the symptoms and their corresponding root cause indicate a direct correlation and other times the correlation is not as clear. Often when a patient is recalling their history they will use somatic metaphors to describe their symptoms or they verbally and unconsciously link symptoms with events.⁽⁸⁾ For example, a patient recalls that their palms get sweaty and their heart races every time they have to speak to a certain person or speak in public. Or a person will link symptoms to a specific event, such as “My pain has been worse ever since there was a change at work.” The primary issue that needs to be addressed is the reason for the emotion(s) associated with the event, not just current symptoms.

Both standard and non-conventional methods of assessment and diagnosis are used to find the cause. The techniques used are based on training and scope of practice unique to each region and may include:⁽⁸⁾

- A detailed history;
- information relating to diet, emotional state, exercise and other lifestyle factors;
- information related to environmental exposure and unique environmental conditions associated with where the person has lived;
- history of previous accidents, injuries, medical procedures, etc.;
- diagnostic techniques including tongue and pulse diagnosis, iridology and other diagnostic methods consistent with the training in a region. For example, practitioners in Europe commonly are trained in iridology. Many world regions include tongue and pulse diagnosis in their training.
- a physical examination is performed using conventional diagnostic methods. In some world regions, such as North America, where naturopathic doctors are often primary care practitioners, this includes gynaecological exams.
- laboratory tests are commonly used. Depending on jurisdictional latitude this can include blood tests, urine analysis, testing of hair, stool and other secretions. Some naturopaths / naturopathic doctors are also trained to utilize X-ray reports and scans as part of their assessment.
- Referral to a medical doctor or specialist may be required for aspects of the assessment depending on the scope of practice of the naturopath / naturopathic doctor in each jurisdiction.

There is a lot of similarity and overlap with how the naturopathic profession explores *tolle causam* and the Social Determinants of Health.

Contributors to the Naturopathic Principle, Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*)

Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*) is a central tenet of naturopathic practice. As such, there have been many naturopaths / naturopathic practitioners and other professional inquiring about and examining the causes of disease. Some of the key contributors to naturopathic profession include:

- **Hildegard von Bingen** (1098-1779): she describes in her book “*Causae et Curae*” the general functioning of the human organism by a balance of internal secretions, whose alteration causes the different ailments.^(14, 39)
- **Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland** (1762-1836) writes about causes of diseases in his book *Lehrbuch der allgemeinen Heilkunde*: “Differentiation between the nearest, the distant, the disposing and the excitatory causes of diseases is a complex of more than only one cause, the consideration of which is the condition for healing.”⁽⁵⁴⁾

The following theories preceded and contributed to the principle of Treat the Cause (*tolle causam*).

- **H. Benjamin** (1896-1966), an English naturopath, published in 1936 his work “*Everybody`s Guide to Nature Cure*”, where he laid down what were for him the fundamental principles of Naturopathy:
 - *First.* According to Benjamin, the most fundamental principle is “that all forms of disease are due to the same cause, that is to say, to the accumulation in the system of residual substances and bodily wastes that have been retiring in the body of the individual in question over the years, because of wrong habits of life.” It follows that “the only cause of curing the disease is using methods that enable the system to rid itself of these toxic accumulations, which hinder the daily operation of the human machine.”
 - *Second.* The organism always strives to achieve the well-being of the individual, “so that the symptoms of all acute diseases (from colds to typhoid fever)” are only attempts by the organism to eliminate accumulated waste substances (some which are inherited) that hinder its proper functioning.”
 - *Third.* The third theory of Benjamin is that “the organism

can by itself operate the return of the normal well-being that we call health, as long as adequate means are used to facilitate its performance.” The adequate means to facilitate the recovery of the organism, according to Benjamin, proposed by Naturopathy are: fasting, scientific diet, hydrotherapy, measures of physical and hygienic strengthening in general and psychotherapy.⁽⁶⁸⁾

➤ *The Naturopathic Criterion*⁶⁹ was outlined by **Juan Esteve Dulin** in 1958 and it states:

A) Unit of origin of all diseases, attributable, essentially, to multiple errors in our way of life. B) Natural Laws are real vital imperatives that cannot be transgressed with impunity. Breathing, moving, eating and eliminating waste metabolism are essential acts of our existence. Pulmonary and cutaneous respiration, cleansing and pigmentation of the skin, movement and rest, rational feeding and proper elimination, with self-control over our habits and passions, are clearly the main factors of our health and our normal longevity. C) Deficiencies in education and customs are the main causes of the disease. D) The set of functional imbalances that we include in the term of disease is always the expression of the efforts that the organism makes to defend against pathogenic factors or to adapt to antiphysiological conditions of life. E) Vitiating air, sedentary lifestyle, physical or mental overloading, deficiencies or excesses, intoxication or acidosis and demineralization, customs, passions and vices uncontrolled, outside contagions and accidents, are no doubt some of the causes of all diseases. F) The body defends more or less well against these pathogenic factors, according to the hereditary vitality of each. We bring at birth a force of unknown essence (the vital force) that determines the natural immunity to the infections, the healing of the wounds and the cure of the diseases. G) Symptoms are natural defences. The diseases are crisis of humoral purification, of organic cleaning and of toxic elimination and it is natura medicatrix that protects, immunizes and cures. H) The therapeutic function is to help nature. All illnesses heal with an evacuation, by the mouth, by the anus, by the bladder or by some other emunctories. The organ of sweat is one of the main and common to all evils. I) Search our behaviour for the source of our state of health. J) All efforts to disseminate natural hygiene in the general

public and increase their confidence in natural cure will always be few”. Juan Esteve Dulin concludes the text by referring directly to Naturopathy in the following terms:

"The true cause of the credit of Naturopathy, throughout time and throughout the world resides, however, more than in its theoretical bases, in its natural application of natural agents (air, light, exercise, rest, heliohydrotherapy, fasting and diet well administered and alkaline, with the eventual help of medicinal plants) is enough to obtain the normalization of health, while is still possible. "(69)

Dulin goes on to say, "The efficacy of Naturopathy is indisputable, and the use of drugs and operations should be reserved, as Dr. Paul Carton argued, for extreme cases, which naturist culture would become increasingly rare.”(70)

The following are examples of models been created to depict the principle of Treat the Cause (tolle causam).

Root Cause – 5 Whys was developed by Sakichi Toyoda (1867-1930).

By repeating why five times, the nature of the problem as well as its solution becomes clear and helps to discover the root cause of a problem.(71)

Factors That Influence Health and Disease

In 2009, naturopathic doctor Iva Lloyd⁽⁸⁾ grouped the factors that influence health and disease into the following categories: personal essence (spirituality), genetics / gestational, lifestyle, social, environmental, external, medical interventions and physiological factors.

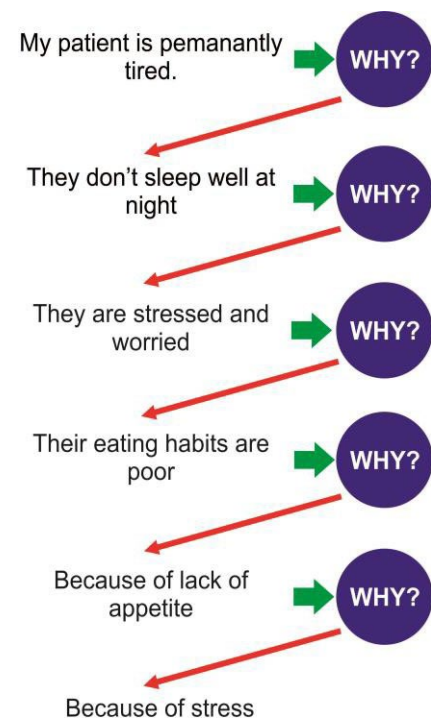


Fig 1: 5 Whys in clinical practice (courtesy of Phillip Cottingham)

The term “factors that influence health and disease” recognizes that every factor can either stimulate health or contribute to disease depending on the degree to which it is in line with a person’s constitution, whether it is appropriate for the individual for their age and stage of their life and impact of the exposure itself. The factors that influence health and disease include:

- Personal Essence
- Genetics / gestational factors
- Lifestyle
- Social factors
- Environmental factors
- External factors
- Medical intervention impact
- Physiology as it relates to natural urges and the progression of disease.

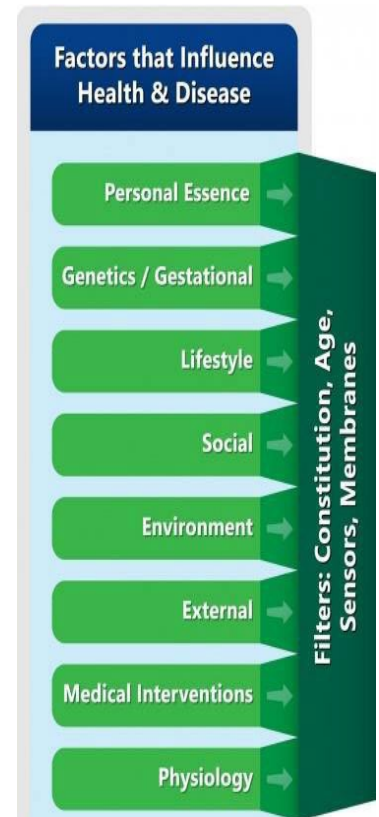


Fig 2: Factors that influence health & disease (courtesy of Dr. Iva Lloyd, ND), [http://www.ndhealthfacts.org/wiki/Category: Factors_That_Influence_Health](http://www.ndhealthfacts.org/wiki/Category:Factors_That_Influence_Health)

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