BRUSH STROKES IN ‘UNHINGED’ A BIT TOO BROAD

We want a quick fix for everything. The current era of fast-paced technology, fast food, fast-acting drugs, and fast fixes for disease leading to a fast buck has stirred a vicious cycle. Yet, Hippocrates believed that disease is the product of several factors: environment, diet, and living habits.

Considering the complexity of human beings, “fixing” those with mood disorders, anxiety, and phobias with state-of-the-art medications after a lecture on their side effects is not the answer.

The altered state in which these medications can leave our patients can lead to catastrophic changes elsewhere if one does not understand the nonlinear nature of the human body. The “butterfly effect,” a mathematical model introduced by Edward N. Lorenz, Ph.D., the late mathematician and meteorologist, is a good example of this principle.

Dr. Lorenz showed that a tiny disturbance such as the flapping of a butterfly’s wings in South America, for example, can affect the weather in Central Park. Similarly, our current linear methodolody of psychiatric disorders must not be considered in a vacuum. Likewise, physical and mental vital signs must be viewed in their totality.

To quote Hippocrates yet again: “It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has.” Nature loves homeostasis, and your body naturally strives to attain it. Our perspective toward the human brain and body should change. Human physiology is dynamic and changes from time to time. We need to move away from the paradigm “there is a pill for every ill.”

As medicine moves toward electronic health records and other high-tech innovations, it is clear to me that those of us treating patients with mental illness must remember that each person must be treated differently. A comprehensive view of each individual is needed.

In addition, the way in which mental illness is defined changes over time. For example, in 1977, the World Health Organization’s ICD-9 listed homosexuality as a mental illness. The WHO removed homosexuality in 1990. Several years earlier, in 1973, it removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders II. Pope Leo XIII purportedly used to carry a hip flask of the coca-treated Vin Mariani with him, and he awarded a Vatican gold medal to Angelo Mariani, known as the world’s first cocaine millionaire. The drug was later outlawed in the society.

We have made remarkable strides in psychiatry in recent years. Given these advancements, we must approach our work holistically.

Only when we reboot our approach to patients by incorporating psychosocial and behavioral interventions into our armamentarium will we be able to meet the needs of our patients.

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LETTERS

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