

Chapter 1 – Beyond Flat Earth

I had just opened my naturopathic practice in 1978 when a 25-year old nursing mother entered my office.

Her complaint was mastitis, a painful infection of the breast. The problem had begun some five or six weeks earlier. She had just completed her second course of antibiotic therapy from her medical doctor. Each time the antibiotics ran out, the problem would recur with a vengeance. She had continued to breast-feed throughout the ordeal.

The patient was in a great deal of pain. She said it felt as if the pain radiated from her breast throughout her whole body.

She had a fever with a temperature of around 101 F. On examination her right breast showed an angry red streak extending along its side. It was very tender to touch.

*I took her case according to the homeopathic system and prescribed a medicine for her. It was the homeopathic remedy known as *Phytolacca 30C*.*

I was inexperienced at that time in treating complaints of this nature. I knew this could turn into a much worse condition, such as breast abscess, and thought perhaps she really should be on antibiotics. But she was fed up with the antibiotic approach and insisted on trying the remedy.

I told her to call the office first thing in the morning and report how she was doing. She agreed and went on her way.

That night I lay awake in bed with anxiety. I suspected it had been irresponsible for me to treat this patient homeopathically. I feared she had already taken a turn for the worse and perhaps was at the hospital emergency room.

The next morning when I arrived at the office, I pulled her chart and called her without waiting to see if she would report in as agreed.

She was surprised to receive a call from her doctor.

“How are you doing today?” I inquired.

“I’m fine,” she said. “The pills worked.”

“What do you mean “the pills worked?” I asked.

“Well, I mean they worked. It’s all gone.”

“You mean, the infection is all well, the fever and everything?” I asked, unable to hide my incredulity.

“Yes, it’s all fine ... isn’t that what was supposed to happen?”

“Er, ah, why yes, of course that was what was supposed to happen. I was just checking up,” I replied, regaining my professional composure. I told her to stop taking the medicine, and to call me if there was any recurrence.

From that moment, I gazed on my little white homeopathic globules with new found respect. I had not thought it was possible for such an infection, with such an acute presentation, to completely disappear overnight. On one dose of the remedy!

When I saw her a month or so later during a visit for her child, she told me the infection had started to come back about a week after the remedy, so she had taken a second dose and everything stayed well after that.

This kind of remarkable cure becomes more common as one gains experience in homeopathic prescribing. The secret is individualising, treating each patient as a unique whole.

The whole earth view

Few people today would argue that the earth is flat. Everyday experiences such as satellite television and airplane travel all attest to the simple fact that the earth is a sphere.

But it wasn’t always so. Even to this day, because of its enormous size, the earth appears flat to the earthbound observer. We still refer to the end of the day as the sunset, indulging in the illusion that it is the sun which has moved behind the visible horizon.

In the past, people were taught from birth that the earth was flat. Science, religion, and common sense all combined to reinforce this perspective. It is easy to appreciate the great conflict that arose among these people when new theories of a spherical earth suggested that their world view was inaccurate. It was impossible for those clinging to the flat view to appreciate the spherical perspective as long as flat thinking was used in its evaluation. As such, those advocating the spherical earth appeared to be talking nonsense. You could see the earth was flat, that the sun moved across the sky, that things fell down, that water lay flat. All the existing technologies, and there were many, had been developed on a flat world and worked beautifully (they still do today!)

Eventually this conflict was resolved when the flat view was understood to be encompassed within the more comprehensive spherical view. The flat view works to a point, but is only a limited perspective of the same spherical earth.

A new perspective in medicine

A conflict as basic as the flat earth versus spherical earth has existed in the world of medicine for the past 200 years. At that time, a new theory was advanced by a German physician, Samuel Hahnemann. His theory represented a radical departure from the accepted view of health and disease.

Hahnemann proposed that disease is a process that affects the patient as a whole and that medicines can be applied in small, non-toxic doses to treat the patient directly instead of just treating the disease. For reasons which will be explained, he called this new system of medicine *homeopathy*.

Conventional medicine continues to take the older approach. The diseases are treated, not the patient. In fact, *the concept of treating the patient directly, as opposed to the disease, does not even exist!*

To this day, conventional medicines are still classified according to the diseases which they treat. For example, anti-inflammatories treat inflammation, anticonvulsants treat convulsions, and antibiotics kill bacteria,

The idea of a medicine directly treating a patient is quite different from this disease approach. The basic idea is that the medicine stimulates the natural recuperative processes of the patient towards health. The disease resolves naturally as the patient recovers. The disease is not being directly treated and so, for a given disease, there are hundreds of medicines which might be indicated. It depends on the patient. Likewise for a given medicine, there are hundreds of diseases in which it might be indicated. It depends again on the patient.

Surprisingly, these ideas are as new to most of us now as they were 200 years ago when first formulated. Yet homeopathy is a highly developed science and is used throughout the world.

Flat earth-medicine

Conventional medicine is “flat earth” in that it approaches health problems from the perspective of the disease instead of the patient. Just as the earth appears flat and the sun appears to revolve around the earth, so also it appears that physicians are treating patients when treating their diseases. *This is not true!* As you will see, it is possible to treat the patient directly, as a whole.

As you progress through this book, you’ll see how the homeopathic approach to the patient is more comprehensive and encompasses the conventional disease approach in much the same way as the spherical earth view encompasses the flat view. Just as the technologies which developed on the flat earth continue to work and be used today, so also the disease treatments that have developed work fine ... but only within the disease perspective.

And just as the spherical earth can not be understood as long as flat thinking is used in its evaluation, so also homeopathy makes little sense if only conventional medical thinking is used in trying to understand it. A new perspective is required – a perspective you will get from this book.

After graduating from National College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1978, I spent a number of years in my naturopathic practice in southern Oregon. I gained much firsthand experience in many facets of natural healing. With my partner and two midwives, I ran a home birth program and delivered babies both in town and in homes out in the woods. Using spinal manipulation, I treated mill workers with sore backs. Some of my patients received nutritional therapy, and many benefited from the herbs which grew in the surrounding forests and fields.

But my first love was always homeopathy. I used it in patients young and old for conditions as simple as colds, as chronic as arthritis, and as acute as infections. I learned all types of healing and healthcare have a place, but homeopathy has a special place. It is safe, yet effective, and is based on clear principles.

The reactions of the local medical doctors to our presence were varied. Some were respectful, but wary, while others were openly antagonistic. "It's against medical ethics for me to even talk to you!" an ophthalmologist once screamed at me over the phone.

These doctors did not seem to share our conviction that all forms of healing have a place, that it all depends on the needs of the patient.

The shortcomings of the disease approach

Everyone today knows that there have been benefits from the conventional disease approach to healthcare. Deadly diseases of the past, such as pneumonia, are treated routinely with great success. But consider the following discussions between the imaginary Dr. Smith and a few of his patients.

#1 "I'm sorry, Mrs Jones. All my tests indicate you are in perfect health."

"But Dr. Smith, I feel terrible so much of the time. Isn't there something else we can do?"

"Well, sometimes a trial course of antidepressants is helpful."

Disease model problem: If the disease cannot be diagnosed, there can be no treatment.

This is a much bigger problem than would appear on the surface. First of all, most patients have had various symptoms for years before a diagnosable problem arises. They are told to use one drug or another for symptomatic relief until finally a definitive diagnosis can be made.

It should be obvious that the patient was sick long before the disease could be diagnosed. People have symptoms because something is wrong, but modern medicine, with almost pathological egotism, dares to tell people they are fine when they do not feel well. Does conventional medicine know everything? Of course not. When they say, "Everything is fine, it must be in your head," what they should be saying is "We can't identify a known disease diagnosis for your complaints."

Even if a diagnosis is made, it isn't necessarily correct. Various studies have determined that diagnoses made by physicians are correct only around fifty to seventy five per cent of the time. The disease treatment for an incorrectly diagnosed problem obviously will be of little help and may be quite harmful.

#2 "Dr Smith, Jimmy has been coughing for three weeks! Isn't there something we can give him?"

"Jimmy's lab tests indicate this is a viral syndrome and antibiotics are not effective against viruses. However, if you like, we could try a course and see if it helps."

Disease model problem: For many diagnosable conditions, no treatment exists. Once again, this is a much bigger problem than it might appear on the surface. At least Dr. Smith has been honest in acknowledging the treatment will probably be of little value. Unfortunately conventional physicians routinely over-diagnose and over-treat many

complaints. In such situations, the patient gets well in spite of the treatment, not because of it.

#3 “This is Carol’s fifth ear infection this year, Dr Smith. The medicine is costing \$75 per course. Isn’t there something we can do to prevent this recurring?”

“Well, perhaps a course of low dose antibiotics in between infections will help. If not, I’ll give you a referral to a specialist for the placement of tubes in the ears.”

Disease model problem: Treatment for recurring problems does little to prevent future incidents.

Health problems recur due to continued susceptibility in the patient, but the disease approach rarely addresses this susceptibility. Each recurrence is treated as if it is a new problem resulting in a revolving-door experience for the patient: treatment, recurrence, treatment, recurrence, etc.

Dr Smith is a probably a sincere individual doing his best to help the patients. Yet the above scenarios represent only a fraction of the limitations of the disease in healthcare. Consider the further problems of drug side effects and adverse reactions. Consider the terrible problem of increasing bacterial resistance to antibiotics due to their overuse.

Consider the cost of healthcare. The disease model requires the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies to diagnose diseases with greater certainty. A few patients certainly benefit, but most are merely undergoing increasingly expensive evaluations that find nothing or discover that they have a disease where no satisfactory treatment exists. When this disease model is promoted as the only viable avenue to healthcare it becomes more than just a disease model – it becomes flat-earth medicine. It becomes a fixed view that blinds one to benefits of any other perspective.

There have been many benefits through the development of the disease-oriented view. Homeopathic physicians have, from the beginning, recognised the need for surgery, nutrition, and other modalities. But the flat-earth approach of using medicines only to treat diseases, not patients, is of limited value and carries a much greater risk than many people currently recognise.