PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE FOR NURSES

The Psychosomatic Pathways

PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE FOR NURSES

Second Edition

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with an Introduction by

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Preface

‘... as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head or the head without the body so you should not treat the body without the mind.’

Socrates

The concept of whole-person, or integrated medicine is becoming of increasing importance, and practitioners in the nursing and paramedical professions (physiotherapists, opticians, radiographers, dieticians and occupational therapists) as well as physicians themselves, now fully acknowledge in their training programmes the necessity of not separating mind and body; that the uniqueness of every ‘case’ reflects the interaction of physical, psychological and social factors.

In this book, I have attempted to put forward views on psychosomatic disease, that is, physical illness thought to be occasioned by conflict within the mind. Frequently encountered psychosomatic conditions are discussed, with special reference to asthma and migraine, as these states exemplify, to some extent, the terms of reference under consideration; terms of reference which may be subsumed within the concept of the interrelationship of normal psychology, anxiety and body illness. At the same time, the role of nurses and ancillary workers in managing what is often a non-verbal situation, is described.

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Introduction

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As the author has suggested, it is important that all working in the medical field have a whole-person approach. This means that one cannot treat a person without knowing something about, not only the physical, but also the emotional and social sides of his illness. These are all different aspects of a person's being that make him what he is. It is all too easy to retreat into the illusion of viewing all disease as physical or on the other hand to view it all as a disturbance of the mind.

Psychosomatic diseases undoubtedly represent important areas of illness where mind and body interact in complicated ways. Perhaps some of the patterns we have come to recognise as typical of psychosomatic disease not only arise in the course of daily living but also have a background of inherited behaviour patterns. This implies that there will be both nature and nurture aspects in psychosomatic illness as well as in many other areas of medicine.

All patients, however, show interactions between mind and body when considering their own personal illness. This factor is important not only in relation to the development of illness but also in its cure. It is important for nurses and all others attending the patient to be always conscious, not only of what is spoken to them by the patient about his illness, but also of non-verbal communication. One of the tragedies is that health-care personnel often fail to notice important communications from the patient. They come at unexpected moments

and are not usually elicited by direct request. I am firmly convinced that an understanding of the material presented here will make anyone who reads this book more aware of their role and provide a framework for understanding certain interesting and at times extremely difficult features of a patient's illness.

This book is recommended for consideration in the hope that it will not only benefit the reader by increasing the understanding of illness, but that it may also enable the patient to obtain from you that understanding which so many require.