

Editorial

How Can Anything So Simple Help Something So Complicated?

Recently a patient told me he had been talking to his surgeon about Vitamin C and cancer. A mass had been found which eventually proved to be benign, but even before this was known he had decided he would not permit surgery even if he had cancer and would depend upon high dose Vitamin C. He had become very impressed after reading the reports by Drs. Ewen Cameron and Linus Pauling. His surgeon was very displeased and exclaimed in frustration how can anything as simple as vitamins be of any value for treating such a complicated disease.

This idea is fairly widespread in medicine. For several decades the same belief was the basis for rejecting vitamin treatment for schizophrenia. They believed that a disease so complicated could not possibly be helped by simple vitamins.

The idea is of course absurd, for nearly every serious disease remains complicated until a specific treatment is developed. Then suddenly it becomes much less complicated. There are a number of classical examples. Syphilis is a hugely complicated disease. It was considered the grand masquerader of medicine. It was so complex a specialty developed called syphilology. These specialists were required both to diagnose and to treat this fearful disease. It caused an enormous variety of physical complaints and psychiatric symptoms. It was once considered a part of the diagnostic possibilities when psychiatrists diagnosed dementia praecox (now schizophrenia). Yet two discoveries rendered this very complex disease almost simple: the diagnostic blood test, which was more accurate than the wisest specialist who had no access to the test, and penicillin which became

a very successful treatment and could be given by a physician, even with no experience in treating syphilis. It is possible syphilis and its treatment will not remain simple. On the contrary, it is likely it is becoming more complex and treatment more difficult. It is even becoming implicated as a possible factor in AIDS.

The second example is pellagra. This is the classical Vitamin B₃ deficiency disease. Pellagra was also immensely complicated. It manifested itself in lesions of the skin, of the gastrointestinal tract, and in the brain. Pellagrins developed almost every known psychiatric disease from neuroses to psychoses, from schizophrenia to manic depression. A new breed of doctors called pel-lagrologists, experts in pellagra, was created. But one simple vitamin in tiny doses almost immediately converted the disease from one of the most complex to one of the simplest, and destroyed the entire specialty of pel-lagrology, for no skill whatever is required to eat good food and to swallow a few vitamin tablets.

There is no scientific law which states that complex diseases require complex treatments. Many do, but many more require simple treatments. Many simple disease (if there are any) require complex therapies. A simple disease might be herpes virus or the common cold, but even these may need a complicated treatment. In general, when treatment is complex we know too little about the disease, except for a few nutrient disorders which require several nutrients. In general, Orthomolecular therapists use more complex treatments because they are familiar with the standard medicines and with nutrient treatment as well.

Unfortunately, too much of medical thought consists of these simple, illogical beliefs which have no basis in medical observation and which have no scientific underpinning.

A. Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D.