

MEDICAL PRACTICE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Virchow has introduced the structural concept of disease that led to a consideration of it as a disorder of organs and cells. With this concept in mind diseases were and mostly are diagnosed by the standard procedures such as objective history, physical examination and laboratory tests, without much attention for the mind of the patient. A scientific psychological approach to the personal problems and a sound judgment in the evaluation of their importance in the ailment are of great significance because the nature of bodily disorders can be appreciated only when emotional factors are investigated in addition to physical ones. I believe that if we master the techniques for understanding the patient's goal and the mechanisms involved, as the late Alfred Adler taught, the treatment of any patient's illness will be done much more effectively. On page 32 in his book, *Science of Living*, Alfred Adler states, "It is absurd to study bodily movements and mental conditions separately without relation to an individual whole." Thirty-seven years ago he expressed the view of psychosomatic medicine as it is commonly known and expressed now. There is no doubt that the maladjusted patient has always experienced more difficulties in overcoming a physical disease than the well adjusted one and considerable improvement can be brought about by physical treatment along with correlated psychotherapeutic technique.

I think that one of the fundamentals underlying the progress of medicine is early diagnosis of the patient's disease as well as early recognition of his emotional state and reaction to his general life situation. This emotional state may be the factor in the origin of the illness or the aggravation of it.

The scientific psychological approach in medicine, as I understand it, is an effort to analyze the personality structure of the patient, his mental mechanisms and attitudes, as well as to detect the specific relationship of psychological situations in the precipitation or aggravation of the illness. Statistics show that among the people looking for medical treatment at least 50 per cent are neurotics. This disease affects men and women equally. The character of the patient's various symptoms often determines the choice of the doctor consulted, but it is of great advantage to the patient looking for help when the specialist or general practitioner first consulted understands the technique of psychotherapy. This therapy is directed to the personality of the patient and not to the pathologic changes of a certain organ, and properly used is effective in neurotic patients. The neurotic person may of course also suffer from any organic ailment; then his attitude towards the

treated disease can be corrected while under medical care. Reassurance in some cases is very good but this is not psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy, following the Adlerian method, starts with the history of the patient's emotional responses rather than with his audible answers. For a better understanding of the distinction between the emotional and verbal answers, Alfred Adler used to mention a quarreling couple. The wife had to have the last word, and whatever argument the husband gave her, she used to answer back. Once the man started an argument with his wife and to his great astonishment she did not answer. Finally he exclaimed, "You did learn not to answer!" She looked at him surprisedly, saying, "Did I not answer? I only did not talk." Though she did not answer audibly she did so emotionally.

Obviously in the course of history-taking the patient complains of somatic symptoms like fatigue, headache, palpitation, dizziness, shortness of breath, allergic phenomena, eczema, itching, some gastrointestinal disturbances, which symptoms of course interfere with his social, occupational, or sexual life. The main tools of the psychotherapist are at first: careful observation, utilizing a casual conversation in order to obtain insight into the function of the patient's symptoms.

Family history, number of siblings, their position and education, are of importance; then social background and financial situation are investigated carefully. From the behavior and actions of the patient his goal has to be determined, because "the goal of the individual enables us to understand the hidden meaning behind the various separate acts and emotions of the patient." In his book, *The Neurotic Constitution*, Alfred Adler states (page 93), that "This goal corresponds consciously or unconsciously to the formula: 'I must act in such a way that in the end I must become the master of the situation.'"

Dreams are important. "They are sketch-like reflections of psychic attitudes and indicate to the psychotherapist the manner in which the dreamer takes his attitude in regard to a certain problem." Alfred Adler states (page 400): "The patient must regard the dream as he would the sketch of a painting, the details of which he is obliged to fill in according to his impressions."

In the course of the treatment the patient learns to understand the nature of his conflicts, thereby gaining insight and learning to adjust to his life situation. We try furthermore to detect all the factors that have made the individual look upon a disease as an escape from a real life situation. The symptoms of an illness might have been the means in the preparatory training for reaching some useless goal. Then we ask for new as well as old remembrances, and by looking back through childhood memories we can uncover the style of life of the treated person. This style of life or prototype was fixed in the early childhood, between the age of four and five.

Then we try to find connections between remembrances of the past and actions of the present; the old memories reveal the patient's prototype. It is sometimes very difficult to find out the forgotten memories or, as they are called, the unconscious remembrances. The patient does not understand the meaning of them. For the psychotherapist the old

well as new recollections are of great significance, because they can be interpreted and help the patient to gain insight. The patient's recovery is greatly helped if he understands the motivation of his symptoms and learns how to adjust. It sometimes takes many months or longer to re-educate the patient and to make him understand that there is no correlation between his symptoms and his ailment except the psychological one.

I have quoted Alfred Adler only because I am convinced that by his method we are able to diagnose the psychosomatic disease, to treat it, and to prevent it. As various antigens are of great value in prevention of infectious diseases so, in Individual Psychology, do we have a method in prevention of neurosis.

The development of psychopathic or neurotic patterns can be prevented by educating parents and teachers as well as informing the physician how to use this method in dealing with children.

Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology deserves to be classed as an immortal contribution to psychosomatic as well as preventive medicine.