

# What is the western scientific paradigm, and what are its implications for health...

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The Western scientific paradigm is a model for understanding how nature works and developing ways of overcoming problems (Jamison, 1994). For example, a disease which affects human beings, the exact cause and mechanism by which the disease occurs is nailed down. There is a huge emphasis on research and trials with relation to Western scientific paradigm. Newer ways of treating the disease identified through mechanisms of causation of the disease are explored. In the western scientific paradigm, education, professionalism and scientific thinking have a very important role to play (Jamison, 1994).

Today the western scientific paradigms may be working successfully in various areas such as epidemiology by which the ways of causation of an infectious disease is understood and means of preventing, treating and diagnosing are determined. However, they do not work well for the management and prevention of chronic diseases as still the mechanism of causation which is complex is still not understood. Besides, today people are over-depending on the western system of medicine as a mean for obtaining a cure from various diseases and other health problems (Longino, 1997).

The Western scientific paradigm consists of 5 concepts including mind-body dualism, mechanical analogy, physical reductionism, definitive regimen and specific causation of a disease. According to the first concept of mind-body dualism, both mind and body are two separate entities which are considered different from a disease viewpoint. However, several forms of holistic medicine consider these two entities as the same and have worked towards integrating their management. The mind may be involved with the body

through psychological, neurological and even immunological action (Wisneki, 2005).

The second concept is of mechanical analogy in which the body consists of 5 systems that are associated with one another. According to the third concept, physical reductionism is a mean of treating the cause of the disease and not managing any other contributing factor. According to the concept of definitive regimen, for each condition a set of therapies are needed for which the patient should give consent for the doctor to perform (Longino, 1997). The western paradigm of medicine may have both a good effect as well as a negative effect over the health of the Americans.

For example, the Western paradigm of medicine is very useful in extending the life over the last few decades. People are able to live longer. However, the quality of life has not improved as chronic diseases and lifestyle problems have a serious effect. With relation to management of these chronic diseases, the western paradigm has chosen a symptomatic approach rather than a curative or a holistic approach. However, other systems of medicine such as Traditional Chinese Medicine have a different approach and manage the diseases in a more effective manner (Longino, 1997).

2. What are some the problems associated with applying this paradigm in a culturally diverse society, such as the U. S.? The Western paradigm of medicine in the US is being applied to a culturally diverse society which includes elders, minority groups (such as the Hispanics, Asians and the African-Americans), uninsured groups, etc. As it is being applied over such a vast

society and having several negative points, the Western paradigm may in fact have a bad effect in several cases.

For example, between the 20th and the 21st century, although the elderly population in the US has increased to 20 % from 4 %, and the above 85 years old group has increased 25 times, there seem to be no improvement over the quality of life for these age groups as still symptomatic management is utilized to treat diseases in these age groups (Longino, 1997). Currently, the American system is also very costly and several individuals from the lower-socioeconomic strata may find it very costly to manage any sort of treatment.

Besides often treatment is given at an individual level, when in fact greater benefit to the community can be considered. The Western system of medicine strongly believes in invasive treatment rather than holistic system of managed in which several interrelated issues including the mind, body and other aspects are managed together along with greater emphasis on lifestyle changes. Many of the minority communities which may consider use of such holistic systems are often discouraged.

They are set to suffer as the social, economic and general conditions in the US do not favor these minority communities. Although the Western paradigm considers prevention, emphasis is laid more on symptomatic treatment and not on curative treatment as it may be difficult to prove such therapies are effective and safe. Individuals from various communities have different levels of trust and confidence in the American healthcare system. However,

most of the communities especially those from the minority and lower socioeconomic groups have to over-depend on the healthcare system.

It is important that the healthcare system considers holistic management of the patient, greater emphasis on curative and preventive treatment and sorting out lifestyle and diet issues (WHO 2000). 3. What alternatives to the Western paradigm have been proposed, and how might these be applied to a specific cultural group? Besides management of diseases in a particular community, it is important to consider holistic management, promotion of health, and preventive strategies in various populations including minority communities.

Minorities are more dependent on the American healthcare system due to socioeconomic, access and political problems in the US. It is important to consider a holistic form of management for these communities. Indigenous methods of managing their health need to be considered. It is also important to research the methods of healthcare management of these communities in their home nation where they are able to lead a much more satisfactory health status. With relation to any disorder, the mind would be having an effect, either demonstrating an effect or getting affected.

Hence, mental factors need to be considered. Alternative and complementary forms of treatment such as physiotherapy, homeopathy, herbal medicine, aromatherapy, hydrotherapy, etc, need to be considered as they consider managing the patient as a whole and include preventive outlooks. Some forms of alternative medicine give room for the process of natural healing (in which the body would heal itself). Today the people from

the lower strata and the minorities are serious facing health problems in the US and are unable to use the system as they are uninsured.

Greater efforts need to be made to include these communities under health insurance (Alves, 2007, WHO Kobe Center, 2000). References Alves, R. Et al (2007). Biodiversity, traditional medicine and public health: where do they meet? *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 3(14). <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1847427> Jamison, A. (1994). *Western science in perspective and the search for alternatives*. In Salomon, J (Ed. ), *The uncertain quest: science, technology, and development*. Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press. <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu09ue/uu09ue0f.htm>

Longino, C. F. (1997). *Beyond the body: an emerging medical paradigm: as with so many other aspects of American society, the baby boom may be the catalytic factor that ultimately changes the way we treat our health*. *American Demographics*. LookSmart Find Articles. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m4021/is\\_n12\\_v19/ai\\_20038498](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4021/is_n12_v19/ai_20038498) Wesneki, L. (2005). *The Scientific Basis of Integrative Medicine, ECAM*. <http://ecam.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/neh079v1.pdf> WHO (2000). *Traditional Medicine. Better Science, Policy and Services for Health Development*. [http://www.cwm.med.ucla.edu/sources/who\\_kobe.pdf](http://www.cwm.med.ucla.edu/sources/who_kobe.pdf)