

Belief, pain and healing



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Pain is a complex concept. No single perspective can fully encapsulate or explain how pain is generated, perceived and healed or taken away. Though one would usually think of a wound or sickness with the issue of pain, pain does not simply take into consideration the body, its parts and processes. Anyone would be familiar with phrases like “mind over body” and like phrases which take more than the isolated view on pain. As an attempt to explain pain, Ronald Melzack and P. D.

Wall proposed the gate control theory which aims to explain the perception of pain in the psychological sense. Melzack and Wall developed the gate control theory which hypothesized that “there are special nerves that carry intense sensation to the spinal column” (Friedman, 2002, p. 91). However, these sensations do not simply travel directly to the brain as there is a “gate” controlled by signals from the brain. Hence, thoughts and feelings have an effect on pain perception.

Another concept that plays upon the phrase “mind over body” is that of the Hawthorne effect. The Hawthorne effect occurs when attention influences a certain situation regardless of other factors (Friedman, 2002, p. 85). This concept is important for doctor-patient interaction because despite few and ineffective forms of treatment, a patient may experience positive effects when an attending physician caters to him or her. Finally, there is the placebo effect.

Shapiro defines a placebo as “any therapy that is without specific activity for the condition being treated” (as cited in Friedman, 2002, p. 85). A placebo’s effects may either be psychological or psychophysiological. Placebos work upon an assumed or believed effect on one’s physical state by the said

placebo to condition the mind of the individual taking it. Reference: •
Friedman, H. (2002). HealthPsychology. Chapter 4: Belief, Pain and Healing
(p. 85, 91) Upper Saddle River, NJ: PearsonEducation