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Editorial

Holistic approach to health

Over the past few decades, significant numbers of patients have sought alternative medical treatments instead of or as a supplement to existing systems of health care. Facing increasing health care cost, too much bureaucracy and very often inefficient health care, the public became more interested in finding health care providers who would listen to them and look at them as complete individuals, not just as an organ or an organ system. That attitude led to an increase in the share of alternative therapies (in the United States of America (USA), for example to about \$50 billion per year), about 20%-30% of USA general pediatric patients have used complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), also about 50%-75% of US adolescents and 30%-70% of patients with chronic or incurable disease.

This trend has also led most USA and Canadian medical schools to offer at least one course in CAM. Historically, ancient healers approached the patient as a whole, not as multiple parts. The definition of holistic health also evolved over the years. According to the American Holistic Medical Association (AHMA), holistic health is,

The art and science of healing that addresses the whole person - body, mind and spirit - by integrating conventional and alternative therapies to prevent and treat disease and to promote optimal health.

The goal in this regard is to deal with the root cause of an illness, to increase patient involvement, and to consider both conventional (allopathic) and complementary (alternative) therapies. However, some are more radical in their views and define "going holistic" as turning away from any conventional medical options and using alternative treatment exclusively. This meaning mainly relates to illness situations and sometimes is used for controversial therapies. There are some on the conventional medicine side who are just as radical in denying any usefulness of CAM. Several years ago, in the fall of 2004, a group of providers from different countries (including: Denmark, USA, Norway, Israel, Hong Kong, to name a few) met in Copenhagen and founded the International Society for Holistic Health (ISHH). The goals and objectives of ISHH as stated in article II of the bylaws are as follows:

- The International Society for Holistic Health aims "to foster and stimulate the highest quality of health care provision" in all communities.
- The ISHH will promote holistic health care, foster communication among professionals, encourage quality research to provide more evidence-based holistic health and encourage continuing education.
- The ISHH will act as a resource for information and referral for holistic health care, and will establish liaisons with other professional organizations involved in health care.

The ISHH accepted the definition of holistic health as stated by the AHMA (see above). Since its inception, ISHH has held three conferences in Europe and one in the USA. The 4th International Conference in Holistic Health was held in September 2008 in Lexington, Kentucky, USA, co-sponsored by the Division of Adolescent Medicine, Department of Pediatrics at the University of Kentucky. The theme of the conference was bridging the gaps with the hope of bringing together providers from all aspects of biomedicine as well as CAM. The conference was a unique gathering of providers from 23 different countries and included keynotes, workshops, and research presentations.

In this special edition of the *International Journal of Disability and Human Development*, we have included most of the presented abstracts and some full articles based on keynote addresses and some of the research papers. We welcome feedback from readers in order to keep this productive dialogue going.

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