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Stress, Spirituality, and Wellness: Changing the State of Wellbeing within a Public Health Paradigm, Bringing Integrative Therapies to the American Biomedical Industry

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Oral Presentation O12.4

STRESS, SPIRITUALITY, AND WELLNESS: CHANGING THE STATE OF WELLBEING WITHIN A PUBLIC HEALTH PARADIGM, BRINGING INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES TO THE AMERICAN BIOMEDICAL INDUSTRY

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The 18th Century period of Enlightenment marked an era of scientific advancements aligned with a competitive notion amongst phenomenological European philosophers on a quest to explain the observable reality. The paradigmatic ideologies for centuries prior in Western civilization perceived mankind and the physical realm through a theological scope, attributing abnormal manifests as being a product of God or the act of an evil spirit. The birth of modern science transformed the Western concepts of knowledge, and redefined the gaze with which reality and history were interpreted. The public health paradigm seen in 18th century European society ascribed illness, hysteria, and plaguing epidemics from within a theological framework, until the unorganized language of significant observations of disease and symptoms evolved as well.

The practice of medicine in the form of clinical treatment developed only after, during the forefront of the Enlightenment, a shift in the roles of the physician and patient in society fostered a new domain of observation and interpretation. The new science commenced an anatomical gaze of the human body, ultimately restructuring its properties via observable compartments and layers of tissue and organ. Following progressive transitions of arguable maltreatment of the hysteric and clinically insane, the science of anatomical structure and observable disease became Western culture's clinic. In the pursuit of understanding life through the complexities of the human body, the medium of disease in death became the finitude of clinical medicine. The initial gaze of clinical medicine and observation focuses on the anatomical state of the human body, without reverence to an overall state wellness.

The compartmentalized anatomy and physiology born from the clinical gaze of 18th Century Western Europe remains at the core of the American biomedical industry as we continue to treat our most arresting incidences of disease in modern society symptomatically, responding to the observable disorders with pharmaceutical prescriptions, invasive procedures, and fragmented history of patient sanctions. The United States biomedical industry continues to thrive within its Health Maintenance Organization-Pharmaceutical Corporation-Consumption driven state, while the general public adheres to its misconceptions of health and healthcare. A brief historical, political analysis of the physical, psychological, social, spiritual, intellectual, and environmental sciences from an Eastern philosophical perspective reveals a defining contrast in existential creeds compared to Western culture, or how the meaning of human life is perceived.

Thus, the difference in concepts of health rests at the core of the definition of wellbeing. While American culture is centered on capitalism, the symptomatic consumption high cost, externally regulated treatments for overbearing health ailments in society, and an overt disregard for the all-encompassing dimensions of health and wellness, most Eastern culture practices conceive the spiritual dimension of wellbeing to be at the core of human existence. Contemporary, continuing public health educational courses in the United States recognize all dimensions of health and clearly abstract the activities an individual can perform in order to achieve optimum wellness, such as diet, exercise, lowered stress levels, proper sleep, and health lifestyle choices. After a brief survey examining lifestyle habits, academic performance, stress level, and incidence of self-reported mental illness of a small student population at Illinois Wesleyan University, and an assuming empirical generalization, it is safe to say that our society has a severe misunderstanding about the spiritual dimension of health, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and how to cope with stress. Emerging integrative therapies epitomized by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), such as Ayurveda, homeopathy, and energy therapies, are becoming increasingly trendy in popular society, but remain to be institutionalized.