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Behind the Shield

A Perspective on H1N1 From the Inner Terrain



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Americans are seeing in the current H1N1 event exactly what happens when solutions given for any health care issue promote health beliefs that foster primary dependence on external resources such as vaccines. The media reports about the potential dearth of vaccine supplies and a press release from The Hastings Center has already raised concerns about the “just allocation” of the vaccine in hand. Director of American Nurses Association Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, Nancy Hughes, wrote in the recent issue of *American Nurse Today* of the “threat” to health care facilities and workers. She gave strategies for increasing vaccination rates and steps to be taken by health care providers during the flu season, such as hand washing, good respiratory etiquette, and social distancing. These recommendations are important to nurses and their patients and, with the exception of the controversial vaccine recommendation, have been practiced for centuries. During the cholera outbreaks of the early 19th century, nurses washed their hands, cleaned their wards with vinegar, and managed communities’ social distancing plans. We’re very good at planning and implementing infection “control” strategies.

There is, however, another approach to disease that is part of nursing’s holistic heritage that gets so little attention that I thought, after receiving Dr. Cowling’s invitation, it might be a good time to open the seal on the historical records. I would first like to comment on the perspective of infection control that I refer to as the “shields up” approach and then offer another view from behind the shield, that of the “inner terrain.” I will then suggest some additional solutions for holistic nursing care that can be added to the current public health recommendations.

Shields up! When I listen to the media reports about diseases such as H1N1, I get the sense that we are part of a military operation against an unseen enemy. “Wash your hands” and “cough into your

shoulder” are suggestions spawned from the belief that solutions to the prevention and treatment of H1N1 lie with the external operations—the battle against the virus—keeping it away from our bodies, containing it, or inducing our immune system to develop antibodies to it (vaccination). This focus on destroying an external pathogen could be said to have its roots throughout the history of man. Our survival has indeed depended on our abilities to fend off predators. These behaviors and the associated belief that the enemy is without are connected to our survival instincts; they are “natural” by definition and, therefore, are an important part of a holistic plan of care. However, in nature there is balance—for yin there is yang. Centrifugal force, if overemphasized, would lead to destruction without the balance of centripetal action. A day must consist of dark and light cycles. My friends in Alaska and Norway can attest to the physiological, emotional, mental, and spiritual challenges they experience in an environment in which light itself becomes the most important medicament at certain times of year.

It is in times of crisis, such as the sweeping threat of diseases such as H1N1, that people seek change and additional solutions. Nurses and the public know that vaccines and the correlating containment recommendations are insufficient. Destroying and containing viruses and shielding our bodies is a yang, centrifugal plan. The belief that viral illness is caused from without and the remedies offered subsequent to the adoption of that belief not only have their origins in survival instinct; they are supported by the science of Pasteur, Koch, and Cohn adopted in Western society in the 19th century. These scientists’ understanding of disease was that microorganisms had only one constant form and were the cause of disease. Antoine Béchamp, a contemporary of Pasteur, disagreed and produced evidence of “microzymas”—microbes that developed into pathogenic bacteria when exposed to

fermentation *within* the body. Whereas Pasteur argued that healthy tissues were bacteriologically sterile, Béchamp showed that bacteria mutated (theory of pleomorphism) and could originate within the body, that is, the inner terrain. Florence Nightingale, during the same period, seemed to echo the scientific theory of Béchamp in her discussion of diseases:

Diseases are not individuals arranged in classes, like cats and dogs, but conditions growing out of one another . . . I have seen with my eyes and smelt with my nose small pox growing up in first specimens, either in close rooms or in overcrowded wards, where it could not by any possibility have been "caught," but must have begun. (*Notes on Nursing*, 1980, Originally published in 1859, p. 23)

Whereas Pasteur's work was widely accepted and the centrifugal attack on microbes proceeded as in the development of pasteurization technique and vaccines, Béchamp's notion of the inner terrain as a platform for disease was developed further by a German scientist, Guenther Enderlein (1872-1968). You may have heard of live blood cell analysis and the SANUM-Kehlbeck remedies used in treating patients under this science. I worked 15 years ago with physicians who were diagnosing and treating within this system of medicine. I have seen the images of different stages of developing microzymas with the use of a special microscope and computer screen. It is fascinating work that resonates with our nursing heritage of understanding healing as being influenced by the environment within and without.

Nurses know that one disease or illness takes on many forms. The process of healing is never stagnant. The blockage of the movement of energy is recognized in many healing traditions as the definition of disease. Addressing H1N1 from an additional perspective of the inner terrain is not new and yet it is the environment without which public agencies, physicians, nurses, and the media so often make their marks. Nurses are well positioned in communities to not only support those agencies agendas but also to offer integrative solutions, which in the case of diseases such as H1N1 can emerge as those that focus specifically on the inner terrain. Just as we know that disease may be created within, we also know very well that there is a healing power within! It is the advices of those who focus on the inner terrain and on healing behind the shield that are often

suppressed by the explosive power of centrifugal, shielding remedies. But when there are not enough vaccines to go around and hands become raw from washing leaving some exposed to disease, we begin to realize the crying need for a system of support and interventions that offers greater balance of yin and yang, centrifugal and centripetal, in which there is the promotion of the understanding of immune response as a reflection of the environment within and without.

Simple Advices

There are a number of advices (remedies) I suggest to my family, friends, colleagues, and clients that are aimed at balancing the present centrifugal movement of energy demonstrated in the shield remedies and shifting the energy centripetally so as to turn awareness toward the inner terrain. These advices are simple to carry out, accessible, and affordable. Although at first they may be perceived as gentler and less powerful in their delivery, the outcome is indeed effective and powerful. When working with people who have only been exposed and even overexposed to shielding remedies and the associated belief about the immune system as a defense system, it is often helpful to first explain some of the science of shifting one's focus to the inner terrain before discussing these remedies.

The shift in focus to the inner terrain, the inner Self (with a capital S), has been recognized in the healing traditions of many cultures as the connection with the five elements of creation in all matter. A representative sampling of advices is arranged here according to those five elements of Self: Ether and Fire (spiritual), Air (mental), Water (emotional), and Earth (physical).

Ether (Spiritual)

Body awareness is a key to knowing when to raise "the shield," that is, wash hands, take an antibiotic, or get a vaccine. Breathing meditations are helpful in centering, stilling external noise, and increasing body awareness. There is one meditation that I like to suggest when people are exposed to fear of the unknown, such as is occurring with the H1N1 virus event. It is a "smiling" meditation taught by Thich Nhat Hanh in his book, *Blooming of a Lotus*, which

includes breathing and focusing on the present moment. This smiling meditation is called “The Joy of Meditation as Nourishment”:

Breathing in, I calm my body.

Breathing out, I smile.

Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment.

As we do this meditation we release all 300 facial muscles and allow our sinus cavities to open and receive the prana (energy) that is life sustaining. Sit quietly for a few minutes more and allow the awareness of the smile and the face to move to other parts of your body. Notice parts of the body you cannot see such as your back. If you are working with the image of a shield this is a good time to assess the strength of your shield. In my experiences working with imagery with patients, some people instinctively gravitate to the use of a shield or a similar image as visualization for their energy field. Body awareness can help with early detection of illness—whether defined as a shift in the inner terrain allowing for the growth of disease or as an allowance for an invading microbe to penetrate the shield.

If in your body awareness meditation you sense that you are beginning to feel the early symptoms of the flu there is a remedy that works on the inner terrain. Homeopathic remedies work with the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual symptoms that make up patterns of illness. Oscilloccinum[®], a popular over-the-counter flu remedy, has been shown in clinical trials published in the *British Journal of Homeopathy* and the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology* to reduce the severity and duration of flu symptoms. I have used it in practice for more than 15 years and have known people to avert the flu completely by using this remedy. It is most effective when taken at the first signs of flu. So body awareness is an important part of this advice.

Fire (Spiritual)

Heat in the form of a hot water bottle is a common remedy found in nursing materia medica well into the 20th century but little used today. It is an instrument of healing that is so simple to use that children can learn to use it. The importance of the hot water bottle should not be underestimated. The bottle should be filled three-quarters full with warm water. The stopper

is placed in the neck of the bottle and screwed in most of the way. Then the air is burped out of the bag to help retain the heat. Then the bag is sealed. The heat from the water in the bottle gently and evenly increases circulation and warmth to any part of the body it touches in a way that is energetically different from microwaved blankets and electric heating pads. I suggest that the hot water bottle be put in a pillowcase and placed over the kidneys and then the abdomen. Visualize the warmth of the sun charging the solar plexus, adrenal glands, and kidneys, the seat of the life force, with warmth, energy, and peace and discharging fear into the ground where it can be repolarized by the movement in the soil and water. This fire remedy is also very helpful when applied to the feet. Hot water bottles to the feet assist not only in increasing circulation and warmth; the attention to the feet carries the potential to improve our spiritual and holographic *under-standing* of our body's responses to diseases.

Air (Mental)

Wind, even a cool breeze, can shift the inner terrain. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, acute cold and flu symptom patterns may be diagnosed as “exterior wind” conditions. Some of the symptoms include runny nose (the body trying to shed the virus), scratchy throat, and stuffy, itchy ears. I advise the use of ear drops on cotton. My preferred ear oil is mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) flower ear oil. This can be a homemade oil infusion of the beautiful yellow flowers in olive oil or the oil can be purchased. If you do not have mullein oil, plain olive oil will often suffice. Cut a cotton square into quarters. One quarter piece will be used for each ear. Put one drop of the oil on either side of the tip of the piece of cotton. I have done this experiment for many years with clients and students. I have had teenage students who were astounded to find that after using the mullein oil-on-cotton remedy for one class period, their cold and flu symptoms disappeared!

Water (Emotional)

Herbal teas are a healing tradition in nursing. I have documented the expert use of herbal teas by nurses to the early 17th century. Teas have been one of my preferred advices for more than 20 years. A single herbal tea is known as a “simple.” When people make

the tea they are making their own “medicine.” Preparing simples can be very empowering for people, especially when they are trying to deal with the common cold and flu for which there is no known biomedical “cure.” In many healing traditions, acute diseases such as cold and flu are thought to be aggravated if not caused by a closing of the pores. I suggest to people that they watch their body for early signs of flu such as the closing of their pores. It is interesting that one of the common Western herbs used in dealing with symptom-sign patterns related to these conditions is elder (*Sambucus nigra*), which opens the pores. A common “sweating tea” used by herbalists includes peppermint leaf (*Mentha piperita*) and elder flower. Take a teaspoon of each of the dried herbs and keep them covered for 5 minutes in 1 cup of boiled water. Shake the droplets from the inner side of the lid back into the tea. The droplets contain volatile oils from the herbs. Sip while in a hot bath or covered with warm blankets.

Earth (Physical)

Roots are very helpful in enhancing connection with Earth. One of my favorite remedies for cold and flu season is Onion Cress Soup. Onion is a plant that is well known in use by nurse-herbalists throughout the centuries for alleviating discomfort related to respiratory conditions. I add watercress (*Nasturtium officinale*), an old European remedy for respiratory illness and catarrh, to the soup. Here is the recipe:

Cut 2 large onions into small pieces but do not mince. Cover with 4 cups (960 mL) of vegetable or organic chicken stock. Cook the onions in the stock on medium low heat until the onions are very tender but do not boil. Add liquid aminos or sea salt to taste. Trim the leaves from the cress stalks, and add the cress to the soup before serving. The cress is best if it is still green when served. In the southeastern United States we often substitute finely chopped mustard greens or collards!

These five simples are only a few examples of the numerous advices nurses create for people in need. Helping the public to discover the perspective of the inner terrain is foundational to nurses' Self-care support. Working with remedies harnessing the five elements can create a balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces that can be life sustaining even if one becomes ill. Just as there are no guarantees that a vaccine will prevent H1N1 disease, there are no guarantees that any of these simple advices will prevent it either. But when people care for themselves with support from their community nurses, the energy generated from the fear of the unknown is channeled into empowered action with potential for meaningful change. Fear is known to weaken immune response. So much of what we are hearing on television and reading in the media raises fears about not being able to get a vaccine, the fear of death from viruses, or the fear of being mandated to vaccinate oneself and one's family. The controversy seems to stem from fear at every turn. Holistic nurses have skills to turn this energy around. Self-care support is a nursing healing tradition rooted in compassion. The perspective of redirecting some intention to the inner terrain and educating the public about some remedies based on the five elements of care can help create balance in health and society.

Some of the simplest nurses' remedies throughout history have been known to significantly affect human health. Soups, teas, backrubs, footbaths, and counseling are what our communities need, especially now. These remedies are simple chalices for our efforts of compassionate care and the healing power of the elements of fire, air, water, and earth that can lift a person, families, and whole communities out of the despair that can occur in times of crisis. The voice of holistic nurses must be heard in the media and their presence felt and seen in community as the conduit for shifts in consciousness about H1N1. It is time to mobilize the healer within as the power behind the shield to draw forth more gentle and effective solutions for healing.

—Martha M. Libster, PhD, RN, CNS