



THE POWER TO HEAL THE BODY: “ABOUT POSITIVE THINKING”

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In my years of practice, I have seen many patients with different pathologies, and therefore with different degrees of severity in their condition. In each case, I have yet to stop feeling highly satisfied when the patient recovers, is discharged and returns home to his family, happy, recovered and radiant. This last characteristic, I believe to have perceived in many of them.

During an afternoon of rest in which the wind warned me that the end of summer was drawing near; I thought about that once again. About happiness, gratitude and positive thinking. I read once that thoughts heal more than medications. When I read this, it produced mixed feelings. I thought about some of my elderly patients, with chronic pain in the spine and osteoarthritis of the knees. In several of them, their positive attitude towards the disease allowed them to cope with the pain when it increased [1]. Nevertheless, what produced perceptible relief was proper medication and kinesics treatment. I do not mean to say that attitude is not important, however, how do we measure the influence of positive thinking on health? I know that the last generation anti-inflammatory medication will not change the natural history of their osteoarthritis, but they will alleviate and

improve the quality of life, and finally, keep their social (and working) life active.

Simultaneously to beginning these lines, I reviewed a book that mentions that a large percentage of women who have recovered from cancer attribute their survival to a positive attitude; women who overcame the effects of the heavy artillery that is chemotherapy. “Their positive attitude was attributed to their being alive”. In the particular case of cancer, its link with thought and emotions goes back to the '70s. Several books have made this clear. One of them published in the '80s by the surgeon Bernie Siegel was called: "Love, miraculous medicine"[2]. Dr. Siegel published much more and since the distant year of 1978, where he practiced as a physician at Yale-New Haven, his focus was on a type of thinking that today we call holistic medicine.

Taking references, which directly or indirectly involve my specialty, we have Dr. John Sarno, Psychiatrist Professor at New York University. Dr. Sarno stated that there was back pain caused by pent-up rage or other unconscious processes, and not due to a physical problem. Numerous studies that follow populations show that there are many pain crises that are not directly related to

changes in the form or anatomy, but on the contrary, they are related to psychosocial factors [3].

High-caliber diseases, in themselves, lead to a situation of high stress, and this can be manifested or "disguised" in many ways, even giving rise to other secondary pathologies.

There is a study that caught my attention, published in the JAMA journal [7], and I would like to mention it. A retrospective cohort was conducted, which sought a significant association of disorders related to stress and subsequent autoimmune disease. A Swedish population was followed for thirty years, from 1981 to past 2010, with groups that were exposed to stress triggers and groups without these conditions.

The study finally significantly associated, in percentage values, the following: those people who had stressful life changes were significantly associated with an increase in subsequent autoimmune disease. The study also says that it is not entirely clear yet whether such reactions contribute to the risk.

This paradox made me go deeper into positive thinking and I discovered an entire industry dedicated to the subject, with many writers, speakers, and faithful public. I also read the most daring coaching, affirming that we are co-creators of the universe, and other "specialists" who take elements of classical Newtonian physics, quantum physics and elements of the New Holistic Age, which include countless therapies and healings. It is a matter of moving the mouse and searching for their names in Google. Their therapies are widely disseminated in books, and many tutorials on YouTube, which are now available to everyone [4].

There are phrases and speeches that seem sensible to me and that, in the proper measure, add more than they subtract. Some, such as, "change your inner self and leave the beliefs that do not serve you", or others attributed to ancient philosophers like Hippocrates "the inner natural forces are the true healers of the disease", or those phrases surrounded by mysticism and religion: "when we appreciate what we have, we attract more blessings to our life" [5].

It would be plausible to think that just as we could get sick with stressful situations or negative thoughts, we can also use them in our favor; and that is, given the current state of things, nothing is certain today; neither the economy nor the employment, not even our health. I am neither in favor nor against this whole industry of positive thinking. As a doctor, I adhere to a realistic, evidence-based thought, limiting the super-powerful attributes of a mind that automatically dominates matter. Not only does our attitude and internal state count, but also, I repeat, a realistic approach in addition to an adequate balance of everything we are and what surrounds us (genetics, age, lifestyle, food, environment, and beliefs) [6].

The doctor's tasks must include a thorough anamnesis, clinical examinations, and psychosocial risk assessment. The maintenance of health and treatment of the disease are processes of inherent collaboration between doctor and patient.

Despite my rational thinking, I kept thinking about magic and miracles. I assure you that more than one colleague has had cases that cannot be explained under the traditional prism. However, they have continued to try to answer the question posed at the beginning of this article.

Yesterday, after a long day, I went to watch the Oscar-winning film: Bohemian Rhapsody and I remembered these lines and a song by Queen: "kind of magic".

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