Ethnomedicine
What is ethnomedicine?
“those beliefs and practices relating to disease which are the products of indigenous cultural development and are not explicitly derived from the conceptual system of modern medicine”

Charles Hughes 1978
Ethnomedicine implies

- something other than biomedicine
- more ethnic
- less scientific
- more magical
Ethnomedicine is:

- the study of the medical systems or healing practices of a cultural group
- the cross-cultural comparison of such systems
- the study of the multiple use of different medical therapies
Medical Systems

- are integral part of the culture in which they developed, exist and continue to evolve
- cannot be understood apart from the social, religious, economic, and political organization of the societies where they are found
- have cultural (shared modes of perception & behavior) and social (roles and organization) aspects
- are an integral part of the social organization of a community
- they reflect dominant cultural themes of society
Internalizing Systems v Externalizing Systems
- physiological explanations
- biophysical signs
- biomedicine
- events outside body
- disease causing agents animate

Externalizing medical systems develop into internalizing medical systems with growing social complexity.
Alan Young: Medical Systems

**Accumulating**
- accumulated, formalized teachings
- written format
- shared w/ prospective practitioners
- training institutions
- conferences
- biomedicine
- Ayurveda
- Chinese medicine

**Diffusing**
- practitioners do not share medical knowledge
- diffuse
- unsystematic
- secret knowledge
- shamans
- magical healers
Fabregá: evolution of sickness and healing (SH)

- biological adaptation to sickness and healing (medical ecology perspective)
- species have adapted to the survival challenges of sickness with healing behaviors
- chimpanzees and use of leaves
- caterpillars and plants
Basic Components in Medical Systems

- Theory of disease causation
  - naturalistic - illness due to natural forces or conditions; upset in balance of basic body elements
  - personalistic - disease due to active, purposeful intervention of an agent
- Health care practitioners with specialized knowledge, skills and training
- Organizational system for caring for the ill
- System for paying the healer
- See Table 4.1 (Singer and Baer)
W.H.R. Rivers
1864-1922

- launched the study of ethnomedicine
  - treating medical systems as social institutions
  - practices rational when viewed from indigenous perspective

- linked ethnomedicine to magic and religion
  - pervasive stereotype
  - study of “beliefs and practices” relating to disease in indigenous cultures
The Great Historical Medical Traditions

- Ayurvedic Medicine
- Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Greek and Roman Medicine
- Greco-Roman & Greco-Islamic Medicine
Ayurveda

- Science of life; Basic texts date from 1000 to 800 BC
- Illness was thought to be the result of sin or demons
- Its objective was the prevention of disease and the maintenance of health rather than the treatment of disease
- Health was secured by maintaining balance of the 3 humours (wind, bile, and phlegm), which when combined with blood determined the vital functions of the body
- Health depended on sustaining harmony between humours and body tissues; normal digestion & elimination
- Body made up of 5 elements (earth, H2O, fire, wind, space) and 7 dhatu (blood, muscle, fat, bone, nerves, semen, ova)
Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

- Basic foundation can be found in *I Ching* (The Book of Changes) that outlines Chinese philosophy of dynamic balance of opposites and acceptance of the inevitability of change.

- Guiding principles
  - balance of yin and yang (polar opposites & cannot exist w/o each other)
  - 5 elements (fire, earth, water, metal, wood) and their correlation
  - factors that impinge on human life (family, food, env)

- Yin and yang are the basis of life; they give rise to the 5 elements (which are linked to each other by relations - ships of generation and destruction)

- Body composed of Qi (animating force /energy), moisture (body fluids), and blood (body tissues)

- Balance and free flowing qi important for health
Greek and Roman Medicine

• “At least do no harm” (Hippocrates)

• Underlying principle of Hippocratic medicine is that nature is a strong healing force and the duty of the physician is to help the body to restore balance and heal itself.

• Disease as a natural process that could be understood through rational study. Health and disease could be affected by the physical environment and by social, religious, and political institutions.

• Astrology (physical type assoc. w/ zodiac, planetary alignment)

• Ultimate cause of disease - imbalance of the 4 humours (yellow bile, blood, phlegm, and black bile), which were associated with 4 elements (fire, air, water, earth) and 4 states (hot, cold, moist, dry). Health was a balanced blending of the humours.
Greco-Roman & Greco-Islamic Medicine

• Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE)
• Alexandria - prominent cultural, political and economic metropolis; site of great library where Greek medical traditions flourished
• Galen 130-200 AD (laid foundation for modern scientific medicine)
  • therapy should be based in an understanding of anatomy and physiology of the human body
  • rejected the application of astrology to medicine
  • His ideas dominated western medical thought in Europe until the 16th century
Biomedicine

• Modern Western, scientific medicine

• Beginning in the 17th century, a systematic and ultimately scientific approach to knowledge about the body and its management began to emerge, resulting in what has come to be known as biomedicine
Key Events for Biomedicine

- Scientific Revolution, 1450-1630
- Harvey (circulation of blood), 1578-1657
- Industrialization, 1750-1830
- Surgical Anesthesia, 1840
- Louis Pasteur, 1822-1895
- Antibiotics, 1940-1950
Scientific Revolution

- 16th and 17th centuries
- new ideas and knowledge about physics, astronomy, biology, medicine and chemistry
- transformed medieval and ancient views of nature
- laid the foundation for modern science
William Harvey
1578-1657

• English surgeon
• Blood circulation system
• 1st to describe completely and in detail systemic circulation and the properties of the blood being pumped to the body from the heart (1628)
Industrialization

• social and economic change that transformed agrarian societies into industrial ones

• part of modernization process
Anesthesia

- the condition of having sensation temporarily blocked
- pharmacologically induced
- allowed for surgical procedures without distress and pain
Louis Pasteur
1822-1895

- French chemist & microbiologist
- Germ Theory of Disease: microorganisms are the cause of many diseases
- pasteurization
Antibiotics

- “antibiotic” coined in 1942
- a compound or substance that kills or slows down the growth of bacteria
Resistance

It was on a short-cut through the hospital kitchens that Albert was first approached by a member of the Antibiotic Resistance.
Rise of Biomedicine

• colonialism

• globalization

• domination of world markets and information systems

• standard to which other forms of healing compared
Dominance of Biomedicine Dwindles

• WHO includes and promotes traditional medicine in the delivery of primary health care (1978)

• Soaring costs of biomedical health care since 1980s

• Erosion of faith in scientific medicine and increasing interest in other healing traditions
  • greater access to health information (internet)
  • consumer desire for more control over decision making
• Until 1970s, biomedicine was the premier medical system in the West and was dominant in world health considerations
• Very successful in treating the physical body
• Psychological, social, spiritual, economic, and political domains not of interest
• Focused on the physical body of the patient and the physical cause of disease
Biomedicine in the US

- Is organized around the scientific methods and principles that underlie our rationalist approach to the world
- Is a hierarchical system
- Health care is organized on a capitalist model
- Prioritizes the individual and his/her illness rather than the social context of ill health
- Reflects our core cultural themes of independence, individualism, scientific positivism, and capitalism
health care system - refers to the social relationships and interactions between the healers and their patients