

Academic Exploration

New Concept of Health with Perspective of Chinese Medicine*

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ABSTRACT Health medicine has been the direction of the development of medicine. However, the definition of health defined by Western medicine and traditional medicine cannot completely cover the full meaning of health. Therefore, we propose the new concept of health: health is a state of physical and mental harmony of different individuals in the life process with the environment, and good self-adaptive and regulation ability to natural and social environment. The new concept of health enriches the connotation of health defined by Western medicine and improves the understanding of health in the past, which provide the conceptual basis for further study on health medicine.

KEYWORDS health, concept, Western medicine, Chinese medicine

Health is a state of human life. It is a dynamic concept, with relativity and space-time characteristics. As to the connotation of health, there are different understandings in different times between the East and the West. With the development of society and economic and changes of living environment, people are deepening their understanding of the connotation of health. For the concept of health, not only there are different ways of expression between China and the West, but also it experiences continuous development and improvement with the development of the times.

Concept Evolvement of Health in Western Medicine

"Health" is one of the old and basic concepts of philosophy of medicine. The word "Health" first appeared in English language in about 1000 BC. It initially had the same origin with the word "holy", and its original meaning is soundness and wholeness, involving strong body, alertness, intelligence and spiritual salvation.⁽¹⁾ For the understanding of health, Hippocrates of ancient Greece according to Humorism (Four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile) proposed the first understanding and expression of health: "Health means (in the body) the four humors of blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile keep in balance." Regarding disease as developing phenomenon, he believed that doctors should not only treat diseases but patients. In this period, conceptions of abstract combination of body and soul were also proposed, thinking "The human body is a whole. There are interaction between the mental part and physical part, but the two parts cannot be independent of each other". This conception tried from the combination between soul (sense) and body to understand the special nature of human.⁽²⁾

In 1946, World Health Organization (WHO) formally adopted the concept or definition of health, which is "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."⁽³⁾ The formal proposal of health concept made a great progress, compared with the idea before 1946 that health means the absence of disease. It also clearly understood that health was related to physical, mental and social factors. In 1977, psychiatry and internal medicine Professor Engel from American Rochester University published an article in *Science*. Against the limitation of biomedical model, he proposed the biopsychosocial model, mainly involving bio-genetic factor, environment (natural and social), lifestyle and action, and health services.⁽⁴⁾ In 1989, WHO adopted a new definition of health, reading "Health is not only the absence of disease, but also involve physical health, mental health, good social adaptation and ethical health".⁽⁵⁾ This definition covers physical, mental, social and ethical factors, which is a relatively complete definition of health.

The concept of health from "Ci Hai"⁽⁶⁾ is: "well-developed human organ system with normal function, strong in body, energetic and have good state of labor

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performance, often measured by body measurement, physical examination and a variety of physiological indicators." This definition clearly put forward some necessary state performance, which was more complete than "health is the absence of disease". However, though it put forward the concept of "labor performance", it still regarded human as living organism, not clearly as social man.

Understanding of Health in Chinese Medicine

In Chinese medicine, there are no the word of "health", but through "balance" and "harmony" to describe health status, which is "Health is the balance of yin and yang". The overview of health is "Only when yin is at peace and yang is compact can essence-spirit be normal",⁽⁷⁾ and "The harmony of blood can keep channels moving smoothly, Ying qi reaching yin and yang throughout the body, sinews and bones strong, and joints lubricative and flexible. The harmony of Wei qi can keep muscles stretching and relaxing, skins soft with harmonious color, and striae and interstitial space fine. The harmony of the five minds can keep a man concentration, not hate or angry, so that the five organs cannot be attacked by external pathogen. If a man has good adaptive ability to cold and heat of climate change, his six bowels will digest food well, wind arthralgia will not occur, channels move smoothly, and the joint movements are normal".⁽⁸⁾ This is actually the standard of health of Chinese medicine. In conclusion, it is "harmony of blood", "harmony of Wei qi", "harmony of the five minds", and "adaptation to cold and heat of climate change". The "harmony of blood" and "harmony of Wei qi" can be called together as "harmony between blood and qi", which means the blood and qi run smoothly in the body; "harmony of the five minds" means the mental and psychological activities are normal; "adaptive ability to cold and heat of climate change" means the body can adapt to cold and heat of the environment, which is "harmony between man and nature". Accordingly, "harmony" is health, and the essence of health is "harmony between man and nature", "harmony between blood and qi", and "harmony of the five minds". It is consistent with the harmony and unity of physical-mental-social-environmental factor of the modern concept of health, which stresses on environment.

Proposal of New Concept of Health

We believe that though the concept of health defined by western medicine covers physical,

mental, social and ethical factors, it still ignores the relationship between human and nature, the diversity of life status of different individuals and the life cycle of individuals. The definition of "health" adopted in 1946, only defined health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being". However, there is no definition or explanation of what "a complete state" is. The definition of "health" adopted in 1989, only defined the health from aspects of "physical health, mental health, good social adaptation and ethical health". This definition also not further explains what the connotation of these aspects of health is. Chinese medicine summaries and explains the connotation of health from the perspectives of "balance" and "harmony". However, this definition cannot reflect the properties of the physical, mental and social aspects of health, and the diversity of life status of different individuals and the life cycle of individuals.

Accordingly, the definition or expression of health given by both western medicine and Chinese medicine cannot summarize the exact meaning of health, or cannot fully reflect all the properties of health. With the proposal and development of health medicine and individualized medicine and that more and more attention is paid to the guidance role of Chinese medicine theory in health maintenance, preservation and prevention, there is a need of concept of health with university and characteristics of Chinese medicine. We propose: "Health is a state of physical and mental harmony of different individuals in the life process with the environment, and good self-adaptive and regulation ability to natural and social environment."

Connotation of New Concept of Health

The new concept of health reflects five characteristics and properties as follows: (1) The status of health: Health can be judged and measured from the status of the body, which reflect the conditions of the overall coordination function, self-organization function and function of homeostasis. It is the result of the comprehensive coordination of multiple organ systems of the whole body, which cannot be explained by single organ system or physical/chemical indicators, or replaced by the addition or reduction of physical/chemical indicators of multiple organ systems. Health status in the physiology is the overall performance of coordination and harmonization of various tissues and organs of

the whole body. Assessment of health status should not only focus on the changes of objective indicators, but also on the changes of subjective feelings. Subjective feelings are also one of the manifestations of health status. (2) The unity of body and spirit: The body and spirit are two integral aspects of life. "Body" is the tangible material, while "spirit" is emotional, mental and thinking activity. The relationship between body and spirit can reflect the relationship between mental activity and physiology of the body. Health results from the coordination and harmonization of body and spirit of human life activities. The harmony of body and spirit and mutual dependency between body and mind are important characteristics of health status. The unity of body and spirit is the existence of life and basic characteristics and property of health. (3) The characteristics of life process: The life process has different stages of birth, growth, prime, aging and death. There are different physical conditions and mental characteristics in different life stages, therefore, the standards of health status should be different. Health has dynamic changes with the development of life, so there is not only one status and one standard in all stages. (4) The harmony between man and nature: Every life has a close relationship with the surroundings. Human is part of social and natural environment. They are closely related to each other and influence each other. The changes of natural environment such as natural disasters, or unrest of social environment are bound to have impact on human body, or even bring about some epidemic diseases or great mental trauma. The harmony between man and nature of health reflects the concept of holism of Chinese medicine. Though modern concept of health also mentions environment, it mainly refers to social environment and ignore or not pay attention to natural environment. (5) The differences of individual ability of adaptation: Every individual has different self-adaptive and regulation abilities. Due to the differences, in same environment the health conditions are also different, which suggests that individual adaptive and regulation ability has significant influence on health. It reflects the individuality and diversity of health status, which is also the evidence of individualized diagnosis and treatment. The concept of health defined by western medicine also begins to focus on adaptive ability. However, it only describes the ability to adapt to society and not include the individual differences of adaptive ability.

With the development of science and technology, the global pattern of science has changed. The global pattern of science means updates of concepts, changes in the mode of thinking, establishment of theoretical framework and practice guidelines.⁽⁹⁾ The advance of medicine highlight in the changes of medical model and the updates of health concept. From what we mentioned above, various definitions of health reflect the understanding of health in certain times. With the development of the times, the understanding of health tends to be more and more complete. Based on the above concept of "health", we put forward the concept of "health status". That is to say, health state refers to the comprehensive state of human body's morphological structure, physiological function, psychological state and ability to adapt to the external environment in a certain period of time, which can reflect the state and situation of health. This concept of health status has different perspectives with that proposed by other scholars.⁽⁹⁾ And it can guide the research of essence, qi and spirit.⁽¹⁰⁾

In 1996, WHO pointed out in a report entitled "Meeting the challenges of the 21st century" that medicine in the 21st century would develop from "disease medicine" to "health medicine", and from group treatment to individualized treatment. Therefore, health medicine which regards health of people as the object of study and objective of practice and individualized medicine which focuses on the individual differences among the population are gradually become the direction of development of medicine. It is commonly believed in global medicine field that the best medicine is not the medicine to cure disease, but medicine to prevent disease; the tends of medical development transforms from endless pursuit of high-tech for curing disease to prevention of disease and injury, and maintaining and improving health. In addition, in the process of maintenance of health, prevention of disease and diagnosis and treatment, attentions begin be paid on individual differences among the population. The proposal of individualized diagnosis and treatment complies with the development of medicine and demand of the times, which not only helps to achieve the basic goal of medicine to cure diseases, but also contributes to the adjustment of the medical direction to prevent disease and improve health. What's more, importance is attached to science and technology, at the same time more attention has been paid on human care. As a result, the 4P

medical model comes into being, which is "Preventive, Predictive, Personalized, and Participatory".⁽¹⁰⁾

Due to the transformation of medical direction, the existing concept of health defined by Western medicine cannot completely summarize the full connotation of health. The new concept of health is proposed considering a wide range of thinking, integrating the cultural differences between China and the West, and focusing on characteristics of health—the status of health, the correlation between body and mind, the life process, the correlation with environment and the differences of individual adaptive ability. It is expected to provide the conceptual basis to the establishment of medical theory system and further study on health medicine.

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