

MASSAGE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY.

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The mutual relations between massage and mind are so complicated that in the nature of the case it is impossible to summarize them in brief. Moreover, the processes of endocrine action and the effect of massage upon certain systems to which we are compelled to assign some intermediary function between body and mind (e.g. the autonomic nervous system) are entirely unknown to us. My treatment of the subject is therefore inevitably incomplete, and I shall only attempt to discuss isolated sections.

A certain harmony of feeling on the animal level between doctor and patient is the fundamental basis of medical treatment which is, in essence, a reciprocal activity between doctor and patient, patient and doctor, wherein the doctor undertakes the duties, difficult to understand as well as to carry out, of servant responsible for the well-being of his master. The term 'animal' is meant to indicate that this important factor in treatment has, to begin with, nothing to do with the knowledge and skill of the physician but arises from the contact of two human worlds and from their mutual human sympathy and antipathy. One does not need a great deal of experience to find out that the influence of this factor in healing is almost entirely dependent upon physical contact. The unconscious realization of this truth is shown by the custom of submitting every patient on the first interview to a physical examination, although in most cases this procedure might be postponed without any ill results.

Skilled physicians of long standing have learned that, given certain circumstances, examination may do irreparable harm, for one cannot always predict the result of bodily contact, and so, often enough they renounce the momentary advantages of a diagnosis and the consequent immediate resolution of the extremely delicate relationship between two colliding human worlds. This is not to say, however, that, generally speaking, the speedy conquest of the patient is not of great advantage in his treatment, indeed it is not seldom demanded by the exigencies of his case. All that is here claimed is that this question of the appropriate moment for making physical contact is intensely important in treating with massage, since by its very nature the exercise of massage compels a closer physical contact between doctor and patient than does any other form of treatment, surgery not excepted. And just as the first treatment by massage consistently and invariably affects the patient both pleasantly and unpleasantly, so does every succeeding treatment; hence we can say with full justification that massage, in whatever way it is carried out, must have some psychical influence upon the unaccustomed organism, and that it is an important, though incalculable weapon for psychotherapy. What we call transference and resistance appear during the course of the massage to help or to hinder.

Massage can be of service both in diagnosis and in treatment. The physician who himself treats by massage thereby gains a most excellent instrument for investigation. That his sense of touch develops a greater refinement is too obvious to need mention, were it not that our methods of work make little use of the feeling-sense, although for our predecessors it was the most important means of arriving at a diagnosis. Vision, too, is sharpened through massage. Not only does one notice changes in form and color due to the distribution of warmth, changes which might otherwise easily escape observation, but also the patient's changing expressions reveal hidden secrets of his soul that in no other way could come to the knowledge of his doctor.

Unconscious impulses and deeply buried traits of character betray themselves in his involuntary movements, so that a massage treatment can hardly ever be given without enriching the doctor's diagnostic knowledge of his patient. His sense of hearing also improves in such a way that he can follow specific

changes in breathing and tone of voice well worthy of attention. But most important of all is the part played by the sense of smell. There is a general neglect of this sense, too, although our forefathers attached great importance to it in forming or correcting their diagnosis, but no one who gives massage can avoid noticing remarkable changes of smell, and even though he may be unable to communicate his own impression in any convincing form to other people, the fact remains that by this means he can detect changes in the course of the disease sooner than he would otherwise do.

It is not only the physician, however, to whom the diagnosis is important; the patient's anxiety to know it is a proof of its significance for him, though here we are faced at once with a diametrical difference. One may take it on the whole that the physician is able to construct a more or less accurate picture of the real state of affairs when he gives his diagnosis, but it is absolutely certain that for the patient the diagnosis at best is but an empty phrase, while in some cases, it gives rise to a completely false idea of the situation. Lack of medical knowledge and the resultant wild fantasies over what will or what may happen in the near or the remote future, often prove a great hindrance to recovery, not seldom, indeed, they give rise to conflicts which invade both family and professional life. The absurd superstitions about medical matters which one finds in all social classes, have become in their half-knowledge a general danger. In certain circumstances, however, this can be obviated through the mental effects of massage. At the first touch the patient's thought and attention are diverted into other channels. He gets some insight into his own condition and wants to find out something more about himself than can be given by the phrase which for him is purely fantastic. Thus he gradually begins to realize that in a diagnosis, e.g. in the term 'heart disease', there is included a number of different things which are more important for treatment and recovery than the anatomical condition, that the sick man, his functional capacity, and his return to a useful career are the real objects of medical treatment, that his state is more important than the name of his disease, and that in disease we are dealing with a changing situation, since illness is an organic process of life, not a thing that is fixed and dead.

As day by day he is faced by new problems arising out of his changing sensations in massage, his awakening desire to learn then becomes so intense, that generally, after a very short time, in the company of his doctor, he is exploring new physical and mental fields which would otherwise only be discovered by the greatest of good luck. Together with this change of attitude on the part of the patient towards his illness and his doctor, there goes what is still more important, the widening of the doctor's horizon. A doctor who gives massage cannot help evolving, stage by stage, his own methods of psychotherapeutic treatment. The very nature of his work makes him a psychotherapist. Certainly his methods are often tortuous, crazy, even dangerous, but that does not alter the fact that the practical experience of the medical masseur gives him a far better foundation for the doctrines of the new psychotherapy than can be obtained through the best theoretical instruction about mind and disease.

Another aspect of the mental effect of massage must be mentioned, an important one though unfortunately almost unrecognized, in its full significance certainly unrecognized. In the course of time human life brings about certain functional disturbances and anatomical changes which have little importance to the healthy man, but which retard the recovery of the sick, and nearly all of these can and should be put right at the cost of some trouble and care in massage. In the first place their removal at once releases energy, though for present purposes nothing need be said on this point: at the moment we are chiefly concerned with psychotherapeutic influences. The mere discovery of these almost universal injuries has an invaluable effect upon the patient's conscious and unconscious will to be healed, and hence upon the strengthening of the mysterious forces which make for health, the eternally insoluble X of medicine. One or two examples may perhaps make this clearer.

The exigencies of life are such that the four extremities, the legs even more than the arms, hang downwards almost the whole day long. The only effect usually noticed is that the influence of gravity sets up small disturbances of the blood-circulation which have little importance in view of the strength of the heartbeat. But other fluids are circulating in the body as well as the blood and the movement of these is to a great extent dependent upon the force of gravity. It is remarkable that this other type of circulation hardly appears in medical theory or practice. The fact remains that certain lower parts of the adult body always contain an excess of fluid, with some reserve one might say, they always contain oedemic tissue.

Chief of these parts are the feet, the hands, and the joints. In the case of the feet, boots and shoes play a special part since they put out of action a good part of the machinery of their special circulation, which is of importance also to the whole economy of the organism. A number of different movements are prevented by the wearing of boots and so it comes about that the adult nearly always stands with his legs a little bent, that he seldom makes any fully extended stretching movements and that with certain joints (e.g. at hip and neck) he either does not bend at all or makes only limited movements in bending.

This waterlogging of particular regions of the body goes unnoticed because it comes about very slowly over a period of years. It is at once revealed to the masseur, however, because he observes with all his patients that the toes, the finger-tips, the great nerve of the sole of the foot, the neighborhood of the knuckles, certain parts of the region round the ox sacrum, particular points in the shoulder-blades, and the neck, etc., are painful under pressure. Usually it needs only slight pressure to establish this fact, in no case such a pressure as that exerted by the weight of the body as it bears down upon the foot. Extended stretching and bending of the limbs and spine are also remarkably painful to the average European, even to the trained athlete. A great part, a very great part of our unconscious mental energy is used up merely in warding off pain from these waterlogged places. As has already been said, the diseased conditions are slow in developing, but for that very reason they can be quickly got rid of by massage, at least partially and for a long period, and that is why they must be brought into any discussion on the relation of massage to psychotherapy.

From the moment that it no longer becomes necessary to devote a great deal of unconscious attention and mental energy to the avoidance of pain, the power thus set free can be used for other purposes, for the task of recovery. This can be done all the better because the patient's conscious mind is able to recognize and follow up in his own experiences the using-up of power and its subsequent release. This not only increases to a marked degree his confidence in his doctor, but also the healing power of his own organism, and brings about a transformation of conscious, unconscious and vegetative mental characteristics of great consequence to psychotherapy.

One example may be given which shows how the masseur, without any further effort, discovers a way which may remain unknown to others their whole life long. The particular instance might of course be paralleled in other regions, and more especially in diseases of the breast and abdominal organs. The value of breathing as a means of psychotherapy is already widely acknowledged, although the physical effects have been made more of, perhaps with some justification. Nevertheless it must be emphasized here that breathing provides and releases an incredible amount of mental energy; it only needs to hold the breath to the point of exhaustion to be convinced of this.

Breathing, indeed, is the chief driving-force of the circulation of fluid which we have been considering. It is hardly necessary to mention that the indirect mental effect of massage in this territory is important, and in the abdomen also. That is the boggy region of the body, since it is the most capable of expansion and, being crammed with spongy organs, offers continual opportunities for collections of water. In this connection attention may be drawn to the fact that the abdominal muscles above the navel, are painful under pressure, owing possibly to our habits of eating, but that this condition can be easily got rid of, together with fantasies of serious disease in the stomach or appendix. For this it is necessary, however, to take the muscles actually between the fingers and this is something of a strain for the masseur. In every adult the eyeballs are sensitive, and in the effort to avoid the irritation, which is particularly associated with looking upwards, there is a useless expenditure of power, mental power. The tongue, too, the gums and special parts of the nose, show the same sensitivity. In other words, with every glance we give, every word we speak, every mouthful we chew, everything that we smell, we are wasting mental power which by the help of massage we could at least in part and for a time divert to useful purposes.

All things considered, we may perhaps be allowed to contend that massage and psychotherapy can be usefully employed together.

NOTE: This article, under the title of "Massage" was presented at the Psychotherapeutic Congress of Dresden, on May 15, 1931. It was published for the first time in November 1931, as "The Relation of Massage to Psychotherapy".

In 1931, the 6th congress of “The Society of General Medicine for Psychotherapy” was held in Dresden. His general theme was “Treat the soul from the body.” The famous psychiatrist, Ernst Kretschmer, was the director of this congress. The psychoanalyst Gustav R. Heyer, a colleague of Jung, spoke about “Treating the Psyche beginning with the Body” and suggested ways of including gymnastics, sports, breathing exercises and massage in psychotherapeutic treatments. One speaker went so far as to claim that a combined mind-body therapy would be the future of psychotherapy. Georg Groddeck gave a presentation on “Massage and Psychotherapy”, in which he described how he used deep muscle massage in his psychoanalytic treatments. (Michael C. Heller (Lausanne, Switzerland) <https://www.aqualide.ch/upload/texte/text81.ppt>

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