

Where is the spiritual ?

A missing link in the struggle
to improve population health

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Disclaimer

- Not expert in social inequalities in health
- Not expert in spirituality
- One attempt to relate Bahá'í teachings to challenge of achieving improved population health
- Sources
 - General Bahá'í writings
 - The Promise of World Peace, 1985
 - The Prosperity of Humankind, 1995
 - The Search for Values in an Age of Transition, 2005

Menu

- « Spiritual » in the definition of health
- Government commitment to the spiritual
- System performance measures and their shortcomings
- Bahá'í criteria for performance measures: a conceptual proposal
- What does it mean for you and me?

« Health »

« ... a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity »

« Spiritual well-being ? »

- 1979 Discussion in WHO Chron
“Spiritual health is important”
- 1992 UN Earth Summit Agenda 21
recognises right of individuals to “healthy
physical, mental and spiritual development”

« Spiritual well-being ? »

- 1995 UN Social Summit. Governments commit to addressing the “spiritual needs of their populations: individuals, families and communities,” and to orienting their policies towards a “political, economic, ethical and spiritual vision for social development”
- 2005 Bangkok Charter for Health Promotion underscores spiritual dimension of health

Spirituality in clinical care

Positive relationship between health and religion or spirituality in numerous illnesses:

- Aiding prevention
- Speeding recovery
- Fostering equanimity in face of ill health

Spiritual values and skills increasingly recognized as necessary aspects of clinical care

References:

Harold Koenig et al, Handbook of religion and health

Larry Culliford, BMJ

Christina Puchalski, George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health

Mary Jo Kreitzer, U Minnesota Center for Spirituality and Healing

Problem

There is increasing reference to spirituality in clinical care

There are government commitments to integrate spiritual perspectives into policies

But where is the expression of that commitment?

Why no interest ?

- Cartesian heritage of the West
- “Spiritual” considered indissociable from “religious”
 - fear of igniting latent conflicts
 - encroaching on a taboo subject.
- The archaic and sectarian attitude of followers of religions and religious leaders
- Practical difficulty of identifying, defining and measuring dimensions of “spiritual” health, especially in relation to the health of our systems

Social determinants health

*going beyond contemporary concentration
on the immediate causes of disease...*

*focusing on the “causes of the causes”, the
fundamental conditions in which people
grow, live, work and age*

Gross domestic product (GDP)

- The total market value of all final goods and services produced within a country

The problem with conventional measures of system performance

The gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and jails for the people who break them. GNP includes the destruction of the redwoods and the death of Lake Superior. It grows with the production of napalm, and missiles and nuclear warheads...



Robert Kennedy

The problem with conventional measures of system performance

It does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It is indifferent to the decency of our factories and the safety of our streets alike. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, or the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

Robert Kennedy

Alternatives

Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)

Health systems performance (WHO)

Other measures proposed by Nobel Prize laureats:

Robert Vogel

Amartya Sen

Fundamental questions

- Why have the current systems of governance failed to provide for the security, prosperity, and well-being of the world's people?
- What fundamental values should guide relationships between and within nations to secure a peaceful, safe, prosperous and healthy future?

The Divine Physician

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. [...] Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, p. 212)

Criteria for system performance

A Bahá'í perspective

- Unity and oneness of humankind
- Interconnectedness of all sectors of human activity
- Equity and justice
- Knowledge
- Trust and moral leadership
- Equality of men and women
- The freedom of religion and belief and the rôle of religion in human affairs

Bahá'u'lláh to Queen Victoria

Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies. Not for one day did it gain ease, nay, its sickness waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of ignorant physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires, and have erred grievously.

on the oneness of humankind

« That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. »

« Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth ».

« It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. »

« The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens. »

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 166)

on equity

The heaven of statesmanship is made luminous and resplendent by the brightness of the light of these blessed words which hath dawned from the dayspring of the Will of God: It behoveth every ruler to weigh his own being every day in the balance of equity and justice ...

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 166)

on equity

It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 221)

on knowledge and understanding

Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone.

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 26)

on knowledge and understanding

It behoveth every ruler ... to counsel [men] to do that which would direct their steps unto the path of wisdom and understanding. This is the cornerstone of statesmanship and the essence thereof. From these words every enlightened man of wisdom will readily perceive that which will foster [...] the welfare, security and protection of mankind and the safety of human lives. [...]

(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 166)

on knowledge

The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 107)

on trust and trustworthiness

O people of God! Adorn your temples with the
adornment of trustworthiness and piety

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 135)

« the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the
world »

(Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 135)

on trust and trustworthiness

Verily [trustworthiness] is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 37)

on trust

When the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts:

« confidence is shaken, [...] the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted [...]

(Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 187)

on equality of men and women

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings -- one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible.

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 301)

on equality of men and women

When women enter the arenas of law and politics and when their voices are heard in the council chambers of the world, they will be instrumental in ending war and freeing vast resources for peaceful pursuits.

"The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war will be consecrated to such ends as to the extermination of disease, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of humanity."

(Baha'i International Community, 1999 Mar 1-19, Women's Health)

on religion

They that are [...] invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world [...]. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine.

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 125)

Are we moving forward ?

Some examples

- Equality of men and women
 - Discussion on role of « girl child » in UN fora. MDG
- Equity
 - Commission on Social Determinants of Health, WHO, 2007
- Knowledge
 - Evidence-based healthcare and health policy

Are we moving forward ?

- Trust

- Laurie Garrett, *Betrayal of Trust: The collapse of global public health*
- David Shore, *The Trust Crisis in Healthcare*

- The rôle of religion

- Millenium Summit of Civil Society
- UN hearing and high-level intergovernmental dialog on interreligious and intercultural understanding

- Unity and oneness

The oneness of humankind

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential [...]. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.

(The Universal House of Justice, 1985 Oct, The Promise of World Peace)

Unity in diversity

Oneness of humankind does not

- seek to undermine national autonomy or
- suppress the cultural and intellectual diversity of the peoples and nations of the world.

Rather seeks to broaden the basis of existing foundations of society, calling for :

- a wider loyalty,
- a far higher aspiration than has so far animated human efforts.

Spiritual principles or enlightened social ideals ?

- Unity and oneness of humankind
- Equity and justice
- Knowledge
- Trust and moral leadership
- Equality of men and women
- Rôle of religion

Materialistic assumptions

Assumptions directing current reflections still essentially materialistic (including MDG)

The purpose : achievement of material prosperity

Modifications in discourse do occur, yet the underlying materialistic assumptions remain essentially unchallenged

Materialistic assumptions

Illusion to believe that the approach to reform based on the materialistic conception of life is capable of meeting humanity's needs.

Examples of failure

International development strategies

Health for All policies

Levels of response elicited are inadequate and irrelevant; incentives are perverse

Materialistic assumptions

Societal reform needs to find a purpose beyond the mere betterment of material conditions

Otherwise, paradoxically, it will fail to attain even that.

That purpose must be sought in spiritual dimensions of life and motivation, transcending

- a constantly changing economic landscape
- an artificially imposed division of human societies

Merit of spiritual principle

- Presents a perspective in harmony with true human nature
- Induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures
- Provides moral impetus

What can we do?

- High-risk vs radical (population) approach
- Raise the level of spiritual awareness, consciousness and discourse
 - In every day life
 - In professional milieu

Medecine and public health

- Largely dominated by the needs of sick individuals
 - Research
 - Health services planning
 - The essence of the patient-physician encounter
- Goal: aid a minority of vulnerable individuals

Praiseworthy, beneficial and must be pursued

- But...
- Not more hope of stemming the tide of mass illness that emergency actions in case of famine can solve the problem of hunger in the world
- Symptomatic and not radical

The prevention paradox

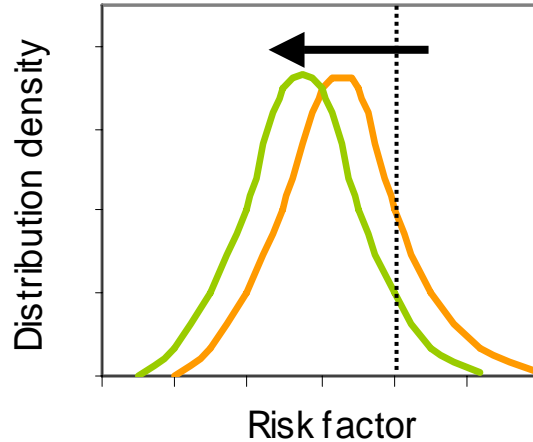
A preventive measure that brings large benefits to the community offers few benefits to each participating individual (seat belt, vaccinations) and vice versa. (G. Rose 1981)

Radical approach

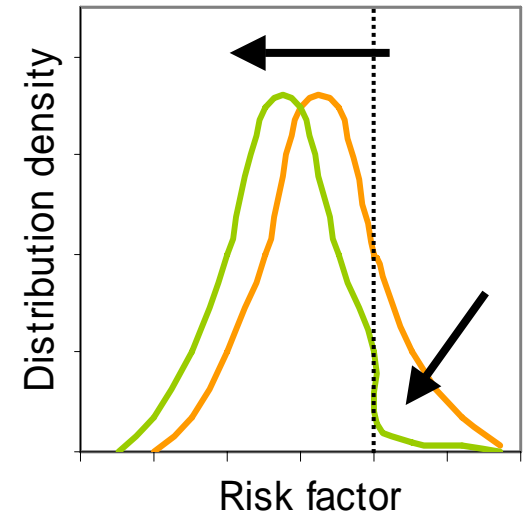
- Identify and (if possible) remedy the underlying causes (« the causes of the causes ») of the great problems of our populations
- The hypertensive, the diabetic, the alcoholic, the abuser ...= the extreme of a spectrum
- Effective prevention implies a change at the level of society

Primary prevention : lower the level of RF in the entire population and in high risk patients

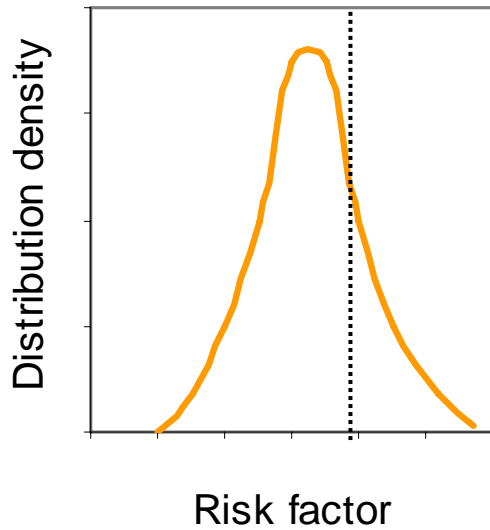
Population approach



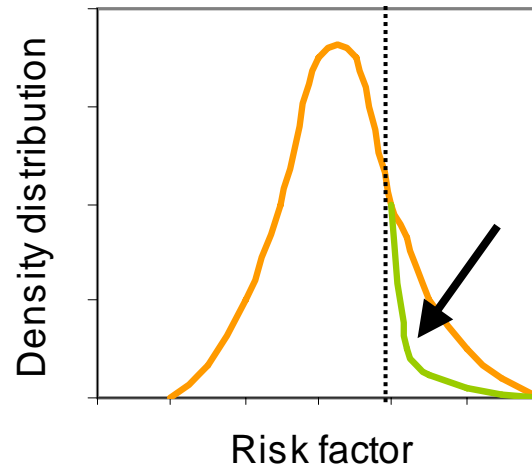
Distribution with combined strategies



Current original distribution of RF



Clinical (high risk) approach



What can we do?

- High-risk and radical (population) approach
- Raise the level of spiritual awareness, consciousness and discourse
 - In every day life
 - Aligning our own attitudes and behavior to the divine standards
 - Core activities offered by the Bahá'í community
 - In professional milieu
 - Nurturing the spiritual values and skills necessary for clinical care
 - Use the statements of the Bahá'í International Community