Anthroposophic Medical Training Methods and Topics

Based on the British Postgraduate Training in Anthroposophic Medicine and the International Postgraduate Training in the Philippines

Background

Anthroposophy, the path of spiritual knowledge underlying this training fully acknowledges the spirit and methods of science but explores methods of research which potentially go beyond the artificial boundaries to human knowledge imposed by the current “predominant orthodox religion” of scientific materialism (See Rupert Sheldrake’s “Science Delusion”).

Phenomenology of the “Four Elements”

This pedagogic process leads to participants experiencing the qualities of the Platonic elements; (or aggregate states): earth, water, air and fire. This can complement the more analytical, “objective” and quantitative understanding of the chemical elements, through including direct sense observations and subjective experience. The resulting qualitative realisation can later be a tool for qualitative reading of a patient’s constitution, illness types, and medicinal plants.

Comparing Plants, Animals and Human Beings with the Non Living Realm of Nature

Taking the freedom to set aside the non proven beliefs of materialism such as anti-vitalism, the living plant realm is compared to the non living realm through naive observation. Then the plant realm is compared to animals such as mammals with an openness to the inner life of sentience being potentially a reality in itself. Then when the human form is compared with a mammalian animal, certain characteristic morphological dynamics of the human compared to the animal can be discovered.

Steiner’s description of the human being as having a physical body created by formative life processes, sentience and self consciousness as four non- reducible realities or members is used as a hypothesis which can make these comparisons meaningful.
Medicinal Plant Study

Modern conventional knowledge of medicines is based on analysis and synthesis of discrete chemical compounds, animal testing, initial human trials followed by RCTs. In ancient times human beings’ use of medicines may have been guided by an instinctive sense for healing plants. Their forms of medicine may stem from an ancient spirituality and consciousness. This course introduces a method of developing an objective and subjective experience of medical plants and other substances which can generate fruitful hypotheses of their potential therapeutic value. This can be verified or falsified by bibliographic evidence and use in practice.

First exact observations of the forms, colour, taste and smell of the plant are made. Then the growth and development of the plant in time is pictured as exactly as possible based on observations and deductions. The steps are intensified by art work. After this experiential foundation participants are asked to reflect on their subjective feelings about the plant and their feeling for its qualities, and “personality”. Then participants are asked to imagine that these qualities could be introduced into a patient (as a suitably prepared medicine). They are then asked for what type of illness or symptom might it be helpful, hypothetically. The hypothetical ideas about its possible uses are gathered and later put alongside any conventional pharmacology available on the constituents of the plant, the traditional herbal uses and the uses in other therapeutic traditions such as homoeopathy, anthroposophic medicine, ayuveda etc.

Organic Projective Geometry

The basic elements of Projective Geometry are introduced. This form of geometry was extensively developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century has been stated to be more fundamental than Euclidian Geometry which represents a special case within this wider geometry. It is capable of dealing with the infinitely large as well as the infinitely small and is more involved in the creation of form rather than in measurement. The mathematics of physics and mechanics can encompass gravity and
electromagnetic radiation such as light, which are treated as forces radiating from points. Projective geometry can provide a holistic mathematical model for the generation of the form of living organisms. The contemplation of this geometry can be experienced as mind expanding not to say mind blowing!

A Qualitative Approach to Anatomy

In an atmosphere of silent reverence, participants are lead with eyes closed to explore four fresh animal organs immersed in water at blood temperature with their hands. Only after some minutes they open their eyes and use sight to further explore the anatomy. When completed by everyone, personal sense experiences and responses are shared, resulting in qualitative experiences and descriptions that may give meaning and context to conventional knowledge of anatomy and physiology.

Patient Study

Methods of widening participants’ patient observational skills are practiced in such a way that a clear sense of the patient’s physical, vital and soul spiritual constitution emerges. This can guide possible therapeutic interventions.

Psychological and Somatic Development –

Using small group work to explore the phases childhood development, the various educational needs of different age children is traced. Concepts of the relationship of somatic and psychological development, is explored as well as the potential salutogenic impact of parenting and education.

Psychiatric Conditions – qualitatively re-explored

Psychiatry is revisited starting with participants sharing their own personal experiences of anxiety, depression, mood swings and fixed habits. The dynamics of the various conditions are compared with the qualities of the four elements explored earlier as well as to the qualities of the organs. The hypothetical connections made are then “tested” to see if the connections make sense of not only the phenomenology of the psychopathology but also of what is known to be useful both in conventional and other approaches to psychiatric treatment. This can lead on to wider therapeutic possibilities, using natural medicines, a range of art therapies and eurythmy therapy to complement appropriate conventional medical treatment. In Steiner’s lectures entitled “Overcoming Nervousness” specific exercises with this aim are introduced. Small group work gives participants the opportunity to reflect on his recommendations. (see below)
Specialist Clinical Topics

These are taught by specialists who have expanded their understanding and practice through anthroposophic perspectives. The topics include:

Anthroposophic Pharmacy, Child Health, Fever, Immunology, Oncology, Cardiology, Endocrinology, Neurology, Pain Management and Rheumatology

Anthroposophic Therapies

The course provides an introduction to a range of anthroposophically developed therapies. There is an opportunity to gain a direct experience of them oneself.

Art Therapy

Eurythmy Therapy,

Rhythmical Massage,

Hydrotherapy,

External Nursing Treatments
Exercises to develop the soul spiritual life of the physician

Parallel to a holistic and potentially spiritual study of nature, the human being and illness; inner exercises to develop the soul life of the doctor are explored. The inner freedom of participants is fully respected and there is no expectation that participants will take up any particular inner practice explored. The course however gives participants the chance to experience and reflect on certain spiritual practices.

The Spiritual Journey - a Biographical Sharing Process Participants are invited to share a thread of “awakening” in their biography in small confidential groups. It begins by each participant thinking about and then sharing life changing events and decisions in their lives and whether they find it meaningful to look at their lives as a path of personal soul-spiritual development.

“Conditions of Esoteric Development” A short piece of text with this title by Rudolf Steiner, in which he describes fundamental attitudes towards life which facilitate a spiritual path of development, is studied in small groups.

To digest and evaluate these “conditions” participants are asked to consider their potential value but also whether there are potential problems and dangers in taking up these attitudes and practices. They are then asked to consider in what ways these conditions are similar to their own way of approaching life or in what way do they differ.

Inner Path Group Work on “Subsidiary” or Basic Exercises A further short piece of text is studied in which Rudolf Steiner outlines exercises to develop a person’s power of thinking or concentration, volitional or life of will, equanimity of feeling, positiveness in life and open mindedness. The study process leads to a digestion of the content and the opportunity to find one’s personal response to the suggested “exercises”.

Inner Path Group Work on the Eight Fold Path A version of the Buddhist eight fold path is included in Steiner’s writings on inner development. This is studied and digested in small groups. Individuals’ responses to the potential challenges are explored.
Growing and Dying Plant Exercise  This is a contemplative exercise on growing and dying in nature. Its use can heighten the physician’s sense of their patient’s vitality and catabolic forces which are fundamental to health and disease.

“A Meditative Approach to the Art of Medicine” This was the title of two courses for young doctors and medical students given by Steiner in 1925. He emphasises a meditative spiritual approach to medicine based on the physician developing his or her spiritual faculties and introduces specific mantric verses for this purpose. Participants are introduced to parts of this course including medical meditations for their potential use.

Biographical Reflections – Turning Difficulties into Developmental Learning In confidential small groups small examples of personal failure are shared and digested in ways that develop personal self knowledge and self acceptance and can lead to practical methods of meeting future challenges better prepared. It can engender an attitude of experiencing one’s own limitations as opportunities for development and learning rather than a source of guilt.

Adult Learning Processes based on the 7 Life Processes – Using a news paper article as a starting point sequential steps of inwardly digesting the content are practiced. When a sense of the fundamental issues behind the article, have been identified, the question is addressed of - how these issues live in each participant? What inner steps could enable the participant to be more adequate to the challenge of this issue? In this way the article can stimulate new steps in personal development and new individual learning.

Overcoming Nervousness – A lecture by Rudolf Steiner in with this title is studied and digested in small groups. Practical exercises are described which may improve concentration, memory, the ability to be more reflective on one’s actions and reduce restlessness.

Fire, Air and Water Trials – Trials with these names are part of ancient esoteric training, as illustrated in Mozart’s Opera “The Magic Flute”. Rudolf Steiner’s book Knowledge of Higher Worlds describes how life confronts many individuals with trials of different qualities which can also given the names fire, air and water. They can stimulate steps of spiritual development. In small groups with the aid of Steiner’s text on this theme, participants have the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences which may fruitfully be considered in this light.

Personal Reflections on Bodily Constitution and Biography – “Karma Exercise” – In three steps individuals are asked to reflect and share on three aspects of their biography. The first aspect is connected to their early childhood environment and early physical constitution. The second relates to their personal likes and dislikes and which of their senses seems most developed. The third relates to their direction in thought and life, their “life mission, question or task”. This process can not only be an aid to self knowledge but awaken sensitivity to patients’ biographic development.

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