

THE DENTIST & DEPRESSION

What's the missing piece in the puzzle to find a cure for depression?



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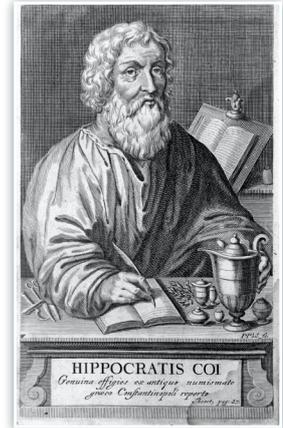
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Unless you've been hiding in a cave for the past few years, you're probably aware that Mental Wellbeing is a hot subject right now, with depression and suicide prevention being the main focus. Doctors, Psychiatrists, and Psychologists are clambering to find a definitive explanation for the cause of depression and to find a consensus as to THE cure. With polar opposite opinions and confusion about depression within the medical industry, is it any wonder that the general public is terrified of a diagnosis of the dreaded 'D' word? Statistics are thrown around labelling one profession or section of the population more susceptible than others, without any purposeful discussion about why they are likely to be suffering from depression and, more importantly, what to do about it.

It wasn't long ago that anyone diagnosed with depression was locked away in mental asylums, and given electric shock treatment, as medical professionals at the time believed the brain wasn't functioning correctly, causing a chemical imbalance. This approach stemmed from the Newtonian perspective that our bodies are similar to machines. He concluded that when a person is experiencing symptoms, this signals that the body and mind are broken, wearing out or were faulty in the first place. This perception has led to the preferred course of treatment that is prevalent today. Medication is administered to suppress the pain or prevent the growth of the symptom, and surgery is used to cut the diseased part out of the body.

Scientists now agree that this approach to health is fundamentally flawed for it negates one very crucial piece of information. And it's ironic that Hippocrates, who was born in 460 BC and considered to be the Father of Modern Medicine, made this observation: "Every natural event has a natural cause." If a symptom is a natural event (or effect) on the body, then it leaves one fundamental question; what's the natural cause?



"Every natural event has a natural cause."

Your Intelligent Body

With the emergence of Epigenetics, which studies how the environment modifies the way genes behave, many experts believe that chemical imbalances are not the cause of depression; that the chemical imbalance happened as a consequence of significant changes to the internal environment within the body. Therefore, what precipitated these changes are the 'natural cause' of depression. So what could change an internal environment? To answer this, let's look at the word we commonly use to describe a set of symptoms; the word 'disease.' The dictionary states that it is: "a disorder of structure or function in a human." However, the origins of the word come from Old French **desaise**: **des-** meaning 'reversal', and **aise** meaning 'ease,' which translated means 'lack of ease.' We should, therefore, be asking the question: "what has caused a 'lack of ease' within the body?" Your body was intelligent enough to create you from the precise division of a cell; hence it won't be creating symptoms for no apparent reason. They would have been caused by a change to the physiological homeostasis within the body, and it's this that would signpost the path to discover a cure.

Conduct any Google search on which profession is most susceptible to depression and suicide, and you'll notice that dentists are amongst the highest. So what are the contributing factors that influence this statistic?

One of the common themes linking dentists and depression is the consensus about their working environment, which is perceived by the majority as bleak. Their working conditions are often less than favourable as many have to sit in small rooms for hours on end, hunched over patients in awkward positions. These relate to the external environment; what about the internal one? The internal environment starts with the individual's beliefs as these will influence the thoughts running through their mind. They, in turn, will impact the way the individual is feeling, and ultimately these will affect their emotional state. A high percentage of dentists feel isolated as they work long, demanding schedules and have little time to interact with colleagues. Having to cram in large numbers of patients to run a profitable business means they forgo regular breaks or finishing work early to enjoy family time or a social life. Financial concerns about meeting the high monthly payments for financing premises and equipment, and paying back student loans, results in sleepless nights and leads to addictions including alcohol, cigarettes and recreational drugs.

For optimum health, it's vital to address both internal and external environments.

Any humanitarian, even romantic, desire to enter the profession to serve the public gets quickly shattered when they experience the fears, anxiety, and dread displayed by their patients daily. This environment would be like socialising with a friend who was verbally and physically abusive towards you every day. Any person in their right mind would not continue to spend time with this 'friend.' That's one of the problems because dentists have to. I can't think of any other profession where the person who is there to help, is vilified because of the insecurities and phobias of the person they are trying to help. Combine this with the increased numbers of dentists fighting legal cases for malpractice, and it's clear to see why many dentists are also suffering from low self-esteem. If this all sounds familiar to you, you're probably wondering what the solution is to this problem.

If I can take you back with me, it's a grey afternoon in June 2013. I'm hunched up in my dressing gown on the sofa in the corner of my dining room, nursing a cold cup of tea and staring out of the French windows into the garden. Even though I'm sure there must be birds singing outside, it's like I'm in a cocoon as I hear nothing other than the incessant chatter in my head. Rather than seeing trees in the garden, I see myself in a straight-jacket rocking on a bed, trying to look out of a window with bars on it.



"This is it - I've gone mad. What happened for my life to turn out like this?"

Then a quiet voice speaks over the derogative taunts in my head and says: "Louise, it doesn't have to be this way."

The voice was enough to stir me out of my zombie state.

"Who said that?"

And then the soft, gentle voice spoke again:
"You know how to heal yourself."

Wind the clock forward to the summer of 2016, and I had taken the voice's advice and healed myself.

After spending years suffering from the symptoms of depression, I discovered my cure even though I thought it would be impossible at the start of my healing journey. After all, the medical professionals and the pharmaceutical industry are the authoritative voice in this area, and they both assured me that this disease has no cure. I read countless articles from medical professionals explaining depression as a severe mental condition resulting from a chemical imbalance in the brain, and how it was also considered hereditary. When I read this, a certain amount of relief came over me. If biology caused this disease, then according to these experts, it was something I'd been born with, not something I'd done. In a bizarre rationalisation of my condition, I

spent less time with friends as I didn't want them to label me as gloomy and pessimistic. Confiding in them was out of the question as I feared their rejection, and so I hid behind a mask that portrayed a smiling face. I felt powerless as the thoughts in my mind spiralled downwards in a vortex full of criticism, and the pains and heaviness spreading throughout my body left me emotionless and lethargic.

The Pattern Revealed The Answer

It wasn't long before I discovered a glaring pattern that ran through the core of my life. This pattern had, on countless occasions, caused my body to lock down in the Fight / Flight state, persistently being in fear of my life (both metaphorically and literally). This pattern caused me to unnaturally suppress anger, anxiety, and grief for years without understanding the damaging consequences of doing so. It isolated me from friends and family as I attempted to battle the mood swings caused by my frazzled mind trying to make sense of a large number of senseless situations. A well-meaning Doctor, whom I only ever visited once, never even discussed this likely pattern, even though the DSM-5 (*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*) quotes this as being a contributing factor for the onset of depression. This pattern caused so much unease within my body and mind, and yet ironically it became the key to finding my cure.

What was the pattern?

I discovered that I'd experienced a large number of losses throughout my life. If you speak to most people about loss (including me at the time), the majority would immediately think you were referring to the death of a loved one. It didn't occur to me that the impact of loss could result from a variety of things. As I started to explore this more, I was able to sort each of the losses into two categories:

1) Loss of my Identity

Anything that impacted my sense of self or purpose in life.

2) Loss to my Environment

Any situation that violated my physical or emotional boundaries, and where my real environment – my home and workplace – changed or was violated.

Does it mean that everyone who has experienced loss will be diagnosed with depression? Not necessarily because an event is only the trigger. It's how the individual perceives that event in terms of their identity and their environment that matters.

And there's another fundamental aspect to depression that is seldom addressed. It's often swept under the carpet as being of little concern, even though it's a vital part to understand if the individual is to feel in control of what's going on in their life.

Anyone living with the symptoms of depression is fighting a secret war inside themselves. As a consequence, their emotions will be dangerously out of control. They'll oscillate between externalising their turmoil through violent words or actions, and internalising everything; blocking out the pain to numb themselves of feeling anything. Understanding the complex interplay of emotions and their biological function is essential to feel safe and in control. However, the very mention of emotions is enough to make most people squirm in their chair because many of us grew up being socially conditioned to suppress or ignore them.

In our modern day world, where we are paradoxically becoming more disconnected as we become more connected, it's essential to effect an immediate change in the way that we acknowledge depression. I believe that disconnection is the Plague of the twenty-first century, even though the vast majority of the world's population uses a small piece of plastic and metal to connect to all corners of the globe. This blatant disconnection from our bodies is perilously damaging the core of our society; the impact being evident with increasing levels of presenteeism and absenteeism in the workplace, and the strain on the healthcare systems. If we revert to the wisdom of Hippocrates once again, he quoted: "Natural forces within us are the true healers of disease." Why, therefore, has the one industry that still swears by the Oath that this Philosopher decreed – the Hippocratic Oath – turned a blind eye to the real source of a cure, that of the body itself?

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The Body Holds Onto Trauma

It's evident how a person entering the dentistry profession can be triggered to experience many losses, both to their identity and also their environment. Include the breakdown of a relationship, lack of social interaction, a divorce or separation, losing a house, not seeing children regularly, and then all the elements are present for the internal environment, the body and mind, to experience a 'lack of ease.' These don't even include losses (and any resulting trauma) that were experienced growing up, such as bullying, abuse, invasive operations, divorced parents or a medical diagnosis, to name just a few. Which then leads the discussion right back to Epigenetics and having the right environment (both inside and outside of the body) for sustaining true health.

Understanding the cause is a start; the real work begins when the individual is ready to walk through the storm of the unaddressed emotions that they've suppressed or tried to ignore throughout their lives. Left to their own devices the emotional states of fear, anger, sadness, frustration, anxiety, grief, bitterness, and revenge can spiral out of

*Uncover the cause
and you'll
discover the cure.*

control and lead to suicidal tendencies. It is therefore imperative that anyone concerned that they may be suffering from the symptoms of depression seeks immediate help from a trained professional; someone who understands the journey and has come out the other side. It's time to shine a light on the reality of what it's like to suffer from the

symptoms of depression. The turmoil of living with an internal critic who is relentlessly filling the mind with words laced with poison, and the incessant battle of emotions running havoc through the body; both of which sadistically direct the erratic behaviours of the tormented individual.

From personal experience, and from working with clients, it's clear that the body creates the symptoms of depression as a dramatic way to get the individual's attention and cause them to evaluate every aspect of their life. The natural and most obvious place to find a cure, therefore, is to find out what has caused the 'lack of ease' in the first place. This will always have its roots in trauma of some kind whether real or imagined; physical or verbal. When I uncovered the cause of my body's dis-ease, I was able to discover my cure. And I write: 'my cure' specifically, as I want to be clear that my approach to healing from the symptoms of depression isn't the only one to follow.

There are many options available to dentists to come out the other side of this epidemic. The simple and most obvious starting point is to change the dentists' working environment to make it more pleasant for staff and patients. The next step is to train dentists, their technicians, and receptionists with techniques to calm their patients and maybe even cure them of their phobia of visiting the dentist. However, the most critical area to address is the trauma that the dentists themselves are holding onto, and it's imperative that they are supported and encouraged to heal themselves first. Treating depression is a serious matter and one that needs proper implementation through further education, training, and appropriate therapy in the areas already discussed. Depression isn't a topic to muse over and shelve for another day, letting time pressures and deadlines dictate the strategy moving forward. If any changes to the dentists' lives are going to change, then something more drastic must change first. And as Rumi, a Persian poet and Sufi master born in the 13th century so aptly quoted:

"Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.

Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."



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