

Bottom up

THE green movement commonly quote the principle of “top down thinking and bottom up action”, sometimes expressed in the slogan “think globally, act locally.” The idea is to consider the overall picture, so that you can understand the consequences of any action you might be contemplating before you act.

Many of the problems we face as a society, or as a species, could be considered to be the result of the reverse, “bottom up thinking and top down action”, and this is clearly demonstrated in our common approach to dealing with healthcare problems.

If we suffer with an unpleasant symptom, we want a treatment that will take it away. So when a drug company manages to develop a product that will bung up our diarrhoea, numb our headache or attack the cancer cells in our bowel, we are understandably pleased. As a general rule however the drug is not all that bright and doesn't know that we only wanted it to do one specific thing.

This is the origin of what we refer to as “side effects”, these are not things that the drug does “on the side”, they are unwanted effects. Having decided on an effect we want the drug to produce, we forget that it will produce that effect in other places and other effects we hadn't even thought of. If we use an anti-inflammatory drug to block the signal that triggers inflammation in response to an injury, it also blocks the signal that triggers the production of the mucous that protects the stomach lining from it's own acid. As a result we have the common “side effect” of stomach irritation and damage produced by this family of drugs.

When faced with a problem such as a bacterial infection, we tend to turn to the magic bullet of the antibiotic as the solution to the problem. Now I am not knocking antibiotics, they can be wonderfully effective, life saving treatments; but this does not necessarily make them the solution to the problem.

By not thinking top down we introduce an antibiotic to kill the particular bug that is causing us trouble, forgetting

that it will also affect other bugs if it comes into contact with.

Hence friendly bacteria that live in our intestines and support our health can have the stuffing knocked out of them, leading to impairment in our health.

Other bacteria around us that we were not even thinking

about come into contact with small amounts of the antibiotic, at levels that are too small to kill them. As the saying goes, “whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger”, the result is antibiotic resistant bacteria; if that strain of bacteria then starts to give us a problem, it's a BIG problem when we are dependent on our magic bullet approach.

Of course many of the health problems we manage to create for ourselves had nothing to do with healthcare, but where the result of our responses to other problems. A wide variety of health damaging pollutants have been introduced into the environment as “the solution” to any number of “problems”, from stopping car engines from “pinking” to making paint finishes more even.

It just goes to show that limiting the range of our gaze to the end of our nose can be truly disastrous.



Andrew Pallas -
Osteopath & Naturopath
at Oban Complementary
Health Centre



Andrew Pallas ND DO MRN
Osteopath & Naturopath
Oban Complementary Health Centre
Tel: 01631 567054