"The good physician will treat the disease, but the great physician will treat the patient" – Sir William Osler, MD

**Becoming a Patient**

Patients are human beings with very human hopes and fears. In the hospital, they have been removed from their accustomed environment. Their valuables and their clothes have been taken away from them, and they feel miserable, scared, defenseless, and in their nakedness, unable to run away. This definition is by Francis Peabody at Harvard lecture in 1927.

**The brain body connection (Hans Selye)**

Stress is the inability to cope with physical or emotional threat, and it has three stages:

1. **Alarm**: fight or flight response, and both nervous and endocrine systems are activated for defense against the stressor
2. **Resistant**: continued high alert (hormones helpful in alarm stage now become counterproductive increasing risk for diseases)
3. **Exhaustion**: body no longer able to cope

All in all, this shows that the brain can really kill the body!

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![Biopsychosocial model](image)
**Signs vs. symptoms**

**Signs:** "objective" manifestation of a disease process (rash, high BP)

**Symptoms:** "subjective" experiences (pain or other forms of distress)

- Healthy individuals develop a new physical symptom every 5-7 days.
- 95% of these symptoms are never brought to the attention of a doctor.

**Why symptoms lead to a medical visit?**

- intensity
- duration
- change in presentation
- family history and previous experiences
- unfamiliarity
- perceived threat
- loss of control

**Some definitions you need to know!**

1. **Disease:** objective physiological or mental disorder at the organic level and confined to the individual organism.

2. **Illness:** a subjective state, a psychological awareness of dysfunction at the personal level, also confined to the individual. Note: illness and disease usually present together but not always

3. **Sick role:** it derived its meaning from the person's concept and it refers to a state of social dysfunction, a social role assumed by the individual that is variably specified according to the expectations of a given society, it extends beyond the person to include relation with others.

4. **Illness behavior:** is the behavior of the person in the sick role
Sick role involves:

- Exemption from normal social responsibilities and other people are expected to take over duties
- Is not expected to get well without being taken care of
- Has an obligation to want to get well and seek appropriate medical help
- Other people are under obligation to be kind and sympathetic to

Illness behavior involves:

- Much of it is a result or associated with the recognized disease
- Some are generated by the fear of disease or the positive rewards and support provided for a person in the sick role
- Sometimes the person may adopt the sick role and illness behavior without having illness or show illness behavior which is out of proportion to the degree of illness
- Behaving normally of the presence of undiagnosed illness

Relevance to medical practice

- A basic principle in learning theory is that patterns of behavior which are rewarded tend to increase in frequency
- It's not surprising that not all who consult doctors with somatic symptoms have objective evidence of disease
- Probably these have been trained to do so under stress since childhood
- To put it in the simplest form, the sick role can be attractive, and so it's liable to be adopted whenever its advantages outweigh those of health
- Different people adopt the sick role according to their coping ability, or to get a secondary gain

"It's more important to know what kind of a patient has a disease, than what kind of a disease the patient has" –Sir William Osler

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