Translation by Patrizia Rustichelli-Stirgwolt

The review of the Italian association of psycho-neuro-endocrine-immunology
Edited by Francesco Bottaccioli

PNEI NEWS

The new knowledge of science and health

FOOD AS A MEDICINE
FOR THE TREATMENT OF DISEASES

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Two recently issued books from the group lead by the psychiatrist Giovanni Liotti bring up old and new interesting observations that redefine and push to a higher level a dialogue which began during the meeting “The Renewal of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy” held in Rome in October 2016.

EDITORIAL

Food as therapy

Francesco Bottaccioli – Master Director of Pnei, University of Aquila and University of Turin

The role played by nutrition in medicine is a very instructive one since its presence or absence in the sciences and practices of care reveals how close is medicine to envision the patient as a whole. This kind of medicine considers human beings in their entirety, it includes food and dietary prescriptions as an integrating part of the therapy and takes into account all those crucial set of complexes that determine the health/disease balance even when there is a clear unbalance on the disease side.

In the last years science has shown a renewed interest to the preventive and therapeutic effects of nutrition, followed by modest clinical testing. This is something new and it shows the existence of a wider movement overturning the scientific theories and practice of the last decades where the focus was entirely set on the role of drugs while food and natural products were considered nothing else than a source of “active agents” to be extracted and patented (in order to cash the relative royalties).

At the beginning of medical history both in the East and West side of the globe, nutrition was the essence of the treatment as Hippocrates indicated when he criticized the doctors who treated patients only with medicaments and not with food, baths, exercises for body and mind. This message was taken up again and broadened by Galen 500 years later. A similar trend occurred also in ancient Chinese medicine, during the IV century A.D. when Ge Hong and Sun Simiao[1] started to reorganize the *yangshen* (nutrition of life) which can be considered as the equivalent of the Greek *diatia*.

A study published in 1981 by Doll and Peto investigating the causes of cancer can be considered as the turning point in reassessing the importance of nutrition in the genesis of diseases and thus as a possible prevention tool. Since then, more broadened and thorough studies have followed and confirmed the role of nutrition in the pathogenesis of cancer, cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. In more recent times scientific research has included the relationship between nutrition and neurological and psychiatric disorders in its

field of investigation. For instance it has been demonstrated that people affected by schizophrenia show nutritional deficiencies, particularly in vitamins. This deficiency could be interpreted as the result of an incorrect eating habit and the side effects of the antipsychotic drugs. One of the last meta-analysis has proved that people in the first episode of psychosis show a lack of vitamin D, acid folic and only marginally of vitamin C: these deficiencies are associated with an aggravation of the symptoms[2].

We do not know if correcting these deficiencies is effective in preventing or modifying the course of the psychosis once it has appeared. This is a task for clinical research which by the way has already recorded some results in the treatment of important diseases as we report in this issue. Multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, migraines and other pathologies show to be sensitive to a correction of the diet. In his interview in the next page, the immunologist Mario Clerici comments that: *These discoveries are giving scientific dignity to what until recently was considered as grandmother's tips or theories without any scientific foundation*. This is a very interesting and comforting observation for us who have been promoting the importance of nutrition on health since decades. We have finally reached one goal. Research must go on!

1. Bottaccioli F & Bottaccioli AG (2017) *Psiconeuroendocrinoimmunologia e scienza della cura integrata, Il Manuale* Edra, Milano, chapter. 1; for a more thorough text see: Bottaccioli F (2010) *Filosofia per la medicina. Medicina per la filosofia. Grecia e Cina a confronto.* Tecniche nuove, Milano

2. Firth J et al (2017) Nutritional Deficiencies and Clinical Correlates in First-Episode Psychosis: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Schizophr Bull.* Nov 30. doi: 10.1093/schbul/sbx162. [Epub ahead of print]