

**YOUR**  
**HEALTH**

**in a**  
**WORLD OF**  
**CONFLICT**

**Clay A. Henry**



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*Your Health In a World of Conflict*

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## PROLOGUE

**“W**HOA! WHAT’S GOING ON HERE with this book entitled *Your Health in a World of Conflict?*” Some readers may make this comment or one similar to it, because the title is a little out of the ordinary. To these folks, the implied linkage of two conditions, human health and conflict may seem unusual.

Is it possible, or even reasonable, to relate one’s health, or more specifically, the lack of it, to the tensions of ongoing, current and past conflict? Yes. Millions of people around the world are caught between the vicious spiral of violent and disturbing conflict and a lack of health. In these cases, there is a sizeable relationship between conflict and the health of both combatants and civilians who are not directly involved in a war.

Widespread or global natural disasters result in public health consequences, but are not combat related. Natural disasters broadly classified as climate-related or geophysical, such as floods, storms, and earthquakes, adversely impact huge numbers of people. During these instances of conflict between nature and mankind, it is also necessary to provide essential health services and safe health facilities for both health workers and patients.

Civil disorder, also known as civil strife, is an obvious illustration of a health/conflict interaction. Civil disorder is a broad term that is typically used by law enforcement to describe one or more forms of unrest or displeasure caused by a group of protesting people. It can escalate into general chaos, criminal actions and human violence.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is another example of a health/conflict illness. This is a severe condition that may develop

## PROLOGUE

after a person is exposed to one or more traumatic events, such as sexual assault, serious injury or the threat of death. Persons considered at risk include combat military personnel, victims of natural disasters and victims of violent crime. Those who experience less severe episodes, such as in domestic disturbances, also may demonstrate PTSD-like signs and symptoms.

Also, conflict has repeatedly been shown to be a major factor in the behavior and conduct of individuals, societies and even nations. Conflict occurs between individuals in a variety of times and places. The connection between health and conflict in these situations is most obvious when physical and mental violence occurs. Less apparent and less understood is the fact that interpersonal conflicts are worldwide. The consequences of these clashes can involve a multitude of health-related problems.

A common thread running through all interpersonal conflicts is they result in damages, afflictions, impairments and losses to those directly and indirectly involved. It is commonly accepted and scientifically shown that if and when interpersonal conflicts are resolved, people tend to live longer and experience healthier and improved lives.

What are some of the pathological health disorders that are associated with interpersonal conflicts? Many are stress related and include situations that detract from states of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Many people suffer from psychosomatic and anxiety abnormalities that manifest physical signs and symptoms but no one specific cause has been attributed to the pathology.

Lastly, an increasing number of health professionals recognize not only the importance of mental health but also spiritual health. Just as with psychosomatic disorders, no single cause has been discovered. Suspected causes of ailments in the non-physical realm include imbalances and defective stabilizing mechanisms that normally function in good health.

I am of the opinion that interrelational conflicts, as well as other forms of strife, have mental and spiritual roots that have not been recognized as significant reasons for many health problems. When a

clash is manifested it can be viewed as a central detriment to living a good life.

It is my premise that when we begin considering human maladies in the mental and spiritual realm, as we do in the physical dimensions of life, proper diagnosis and treatment can yield many improvements of our health. To succeed in this effort, it will be necessary to find the root cause(s) of conflict. Once this is accomplished, steps can be taken to lessen its harmful effects .

## **A THESIS ON THE STATE OF HUMAN HEALTH**

During my adult years spent in formal education and professional vocations, I have had the opportunity to experience many of the practicalities of human health in various settings. It has been only in the past few years I have given a great deal of reflective thought to health-related issues, not so much on scientifically-studied maladies of the physical body, but on disorders showing little or no apparent cause.

Through lengthy research of these types of health problems, I have come to the conclusion that the lack of good and wholesome health may be related to, connected to and caused by non-physical entities, in particular, mental and spiritual disorders.

My overall purpose of writing this book is to offer a thesis that some forms of both healthiness as well as unhealthiness are associated with non-physical aspects of the human body. This book highlights conflict, a universal condition. I describe it as a situation through which persons and groups involved in circumstances of discord not only perceive a risk to well-being, but lack something in both their physical and non-physical makeups. Lastly, I will be addressing how these disturbances can be remediated to enhance health.





## HOW IS YOUR HEALTH?

**D**O YOU CONSIDER YOUR HEALTH to be optimum? More precisely, are your needs for optimum health sufficiently being met? If not, there may be something in your health makeup that is lacking. To help you answer the first question, I'm defining the term *health* as the functionality of one's physical, social, intellectual, emotional, mental, and spiritual composition—or more simply, the overall wellness of the whole person. On the surface, this question I am posing for you can be answered quickly with a yes or no response.

If your immediate answer is yes, I congratulate you first for having optimum health and second, for meeting acceptable levels of all your health needs. You are among the limited number of individuals who have found answers to their health problems. If you answered yes, this book may provide little or no benefit for you and you might want to consider putting it down. I say this not in a derogatory way or in a deprecating manner. I accept your answer of yes to the inquiry about your health being optimum. To me, it means that you view your wellness and/or health not only as suitable, but as enhanced in every way.

Without getting into the issue of conflict and how it may impact health at this point, I am trying to analyze the basis of others who answered yes. This response may be based upon a thought that in some way your health needs are really lacking or substandard to

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some degree, but cannot be changed or you do not have the means to bring about a change. You might even feel as if there's no point to do anything that would optimize the current state of your health. If you have these thoughts or any that are similar, they might be the reason for your yes answer. If so, I readily retract my suggestion for you to put down this book. Please read on.

Another possibility for a yes response is that you just have more demanding things to think about and do than to evaluate your present state of health. Or, you may not want to make this self-assessment now because you have legitimate questions in your mind about your state of health. If this is the case, please read on for I will address such questions shortly.

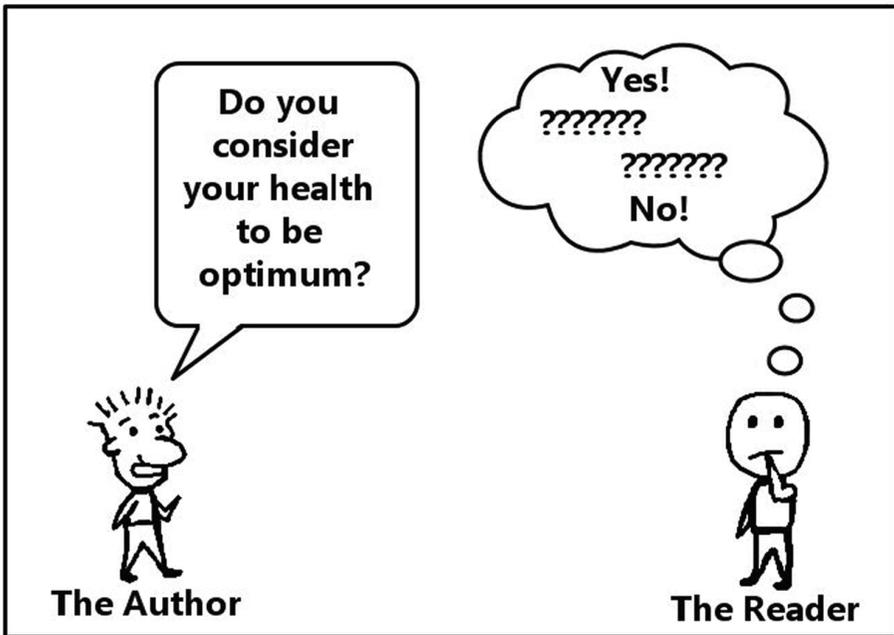


Figure 1.1. Author's Health Question and Reader's Thoughts

To the reader who initially answered no to my question, I heartily say, read on! I sincerely congratulate you and other readers who will read further. By this acknowledgment you have merged with a long list of people throughout history who recognized that the relative

strength of their total health, or least some aspect of it, was less than optimal. This unhealthiness may not only be perceived in the minds of individuals who sense abnormal health, but objectively determined by their acquaintances or health care personnel.

## LACKING HEALTH

Currently, the consensus of the news media indicates, among other issues, a faltering healthcare system in the United States and an overall a populace with less than favorable health when compared to other nations. During the last century, the U.S. has fallen from being one of the healthiest nations on earth compared to other developed nations. This conclusion is based upon several scientific investigations recorded in the research literature on physical health.

One study, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, examined multiple diseases, injuries, and behaviors across the entire life span, comparing the United States with sixteen peer nations, affluent democracies including Australia, Canada, Japan, and many western European countries. Among these countries, the U.S. is at or near the bottom in nine key areas of health: infant mortality and low birth weight, injuries and homicides, teenage pregnancies and sexually-transmitted infections, prevalence of HIV and AIDS, drug-related deaths, obesity and diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung disease, and disability.<sup>1</sup>

Mental health must always be considered as a part of one's total health because it affects all of us. How we think and feel about ourselves and how we cope during tough times certainly impacts our behavior. Our state of mental health affects our ability to make the most of the opportunities that come our way and plays a major role in our interactions with our friends and family, and in the workplace and community. Whether we call it well-being, emotional welfare or mental or spiritual health, it's key to living a fulfilling life.

Research conducted under the auspices of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), shows that mental disorders are common

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throughout the United States, affecting tens of millions of people each year. Only a fraction of those receive treatment. The burden of illness is particularly concentrated among those who experience disability due to a serious mental illness (SMI). Specific examples of SMI include a number of anxiety disorders as well as several mood and personality disorders. Mental illnesses that do not meet the criteria of an SMI are vastly larger in number and are known to significantly contribute to overall costs, disabilities and years of life lost.<sup>2</sup>

A look at lifetime prevalence rates of mental disorders is quite revealing. For all mental illnesses (including substance abuse disorders), the lifetime prevalence rate is an astonishing 57.4 percent. That's more than every one in two Americans. If we underestimate the impact of mental illness on our lives, we could be sadly mistaken. According to the Mental Health Foundation, "Mental health affects us all. How we think and feel about ourselves and our lives impacts on our behavior and how we cope in tough times."<sup>3</sup>

The problems of health defects might seem trivial to some and enormous to others. The truth is extremes of lacking healthiness exist along with a multitude of intermediate health problems. Without some type of assistance, how can one person eliminate or diminish even one problematic aspect of health? The good news is when linked to reliable sources that provide the necessary collection of resources to promote improved health, changes become possible and even more probable than before.

How do we know that people can alter or elevate their health status? One source of evidence is testimony from individuals whose health is improved. Additional proof comes from information provided by organizations that are involved in improvement of health. Of the hundreds of governmental agencies and private organizations in our society and abroad, you may know of some of these popular groups that promise the enhancement of an individual's health.

1. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), seventy-five percent or more of our western diseases are lifestyle-related. In conjunction with HHS, the

U.S. surgeon general, Dr. Regina Benjamin has proposed a number of particular health improvement programs designed to reduce disease risk factors through the adoption of better health habits and appropriate lifestyle modifications. In a recent news release, she stated, “Americans will be more likely to change their behavior if they have a meaningful reward—something more than just reaching a certain weight or dress size. The real reward is invigorating, energizing and joyous health. It is a level of health that allows people to embrace each day and live their lives to the fullest without disease or disability.”<sup>4</sup>

In another effort to further the goal of achieving an elevated state of health of the nation’s citizens, the surgeon general is challenging developers to create apps (application software) that provide personalized health information and empower users to engage in and enjoy healthier behavior.<sup>5</sup>

2. The Center for Health Improvement is a national, independent nonprofit organization dedicated to improving population health and encouraging healthy behaviors. The center provides comprehensive support to help public and private organizations across the country effect lasting change in their efforts to prevent disease and promote health. The Center, in conjunction with the California Health Policy Forum, provides an independent platform for the vast array of health issues facing the state.<sup>6</sup>
3. According to Health Improvement Technology (HiT) envisioned by Microsoft, everyone in United States needs to think more about “becoming healthier” and less about “getting care.” Too many people incorrectly consider these to be the same thing. Officials at HiT further assert that there is inevitable shift toward improving personal and population health and coordinating care as a fundamental strategy to contain medical costs. In turn, this swing will fuel a demand

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for a new generation of innovative technologies, such as Internet-based health improvement technologies.

Such advances are designed to improve health and outcomes for individuals and populations at a lower cost per capita by delivering coordinated and seamless interactions across location and devices. This approach should enable consumers to improve their health habits, self-manage their conditions, and coordinate their care.<sup>7</sup>

4. The Center for Community Health Improvement (CCHI), affiliated with the Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), is an example of a program that has been able to achieve a measureable degree of success by prevention, early intervention, and health promotion, evidence-based and culturally appropriate initiatives. The CCHI builds relationships and works with community partners to make measurable, sustainable improvement on some of the toughest health problems such as violence, obesity, and teen substance abuse.<sup>8</sup>
5. Oklahoma State Department of Health has a Faith-Based Health Enhancement Initiative, a program that provides health information to faith-based organizations and encourages their participation in various discussions to address how we can achieve health equity.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the agencies and groups mentioned above, there are several health optimization programs in the western world designed for those who are looking for a comprehensive evaluation of their current medical status and desire to optimize wellness and minimize health risks as they age. Information about each one can be accessed on the Internet. They include:

- The Vitality Medical Wellness Institute, a fully licensed and equipped medical practice located in Concord, North Carolina, which has a goal to not only save lives but improve them by optimizing the health of all patients.<sup>10</sup>

- The Healthcare Optimization Program (HCOP), under the Missouri Department of Mental Health, has a disease management approach for Medicaid recipients diagnosed with mental illness who are at highest risk for adverse medical and behavioral outcomes.<sup>11</sup>
- The Sam Varner Living Wellness Ministries is an organization that recognizes wellness as multi-dimensional. This ministry believes that one cannot achieve optimal physical health without being in a good physical, emotional, mental and spiritual state.<sup>12</sup>

This listing of organizations and action groups is only a sampling of those engaged in improving human health conditions. These efforts undertaken by conscientious and dedicated people should confirm we are not alone when we consider our health less than ideal. In a very real way, all humanity has a desire to improve their own health and to seek means for the betterment of human life. I sincerely hope that you, the reader, will join me and become actively engaged in the worthwhile mission of health improvement.

To minimize any apprehension about this up-coming proposal at this early juncture, the next chapter will address some of your questions, which will provide introductory information to understand specifics of the plan in later chapters.