



## Posttraumatic Growth: Whole Person Approaches to Working With Trauma

Ilene Serlin, PhD, ADTR

Earlier this year, with the support of Dr. Miguel Gallardo, the Health Psychology Section of Division I, under the leadership of Dr. Michael Ritz, created a Taskforce focusing on "Whole Person Approaches to HealthCare: Working With Trauma." I am pleased to chair this group whose members include Drs. Victoria Beckner, Rick Harvey, Eunie Jung, Stanley Krippner, Daniel Pitchford and Morgan Sammons.

The media reports on a daily basis the sequelae of trauma, in particular, the alarming and escalating rates of emotional challenges, suicide, and violence among returning Iraqi war veterans. In addition, female soldiers can suffer from sexual abuse during combat duty and extended family members of soldiers often need assistance and care in dealing with grief and loss. The numbers do not inform about failed relationships, loss of jobs, identity issues or addictive behaviors these individuals face nor about secondary traumas or repressed traumas that may surface. One must employ a multi-faceted approach towards this topic which can focus on the multiple layers of culture, neurophysiology, and psychological as well as spiritual issues.

The Taskforce, therefore, proposes a Whole Person approach to working with trauma that addresses psychological, physical and spiritual aspects of loss and healing. Emerging mind/body approaches to be explored include but are not limited to: breathwork, relaxation, healthy lifestyle, autogenic training, meditation, writing, imagery, EMDR, traumatic incident reduction, healing rituals, life review, making sense of trauma (existential/humanistic), drama therapy, hypnosis, art therapy, dance therapy, poetry therapy, action approaches, religious/spiritual faith and group therapy. All of these approaches have been documented to:

1. Bring together the split body/mind that occurs with dehumanizing terror,
2. Provide a creative means for discharging aggression and restoring interpersonal connections,
3. Strengthen individual and community resilience,
4. Express strong emotions within a safe container,
5. Bridge multicultural symbolic forms, and
6. Allow creativity to symbolize traumatic losses/belief systems and hopes for the future.

Whole person healthcare integrates the best of medical and psychological practices into a biopsychosocialspiritual model – integrating behavior, cognition, and consciousness into body, mind, and spirit dimensions. This approach takes into account the impact of lifestyle on health issues and educates individuals to become informed consumers – practicing prevention and directing their lives towards self-care and health. It relies on experiential as well as theoretical learning and utilizes symbolic and non-verbal as well as linear and verbal modes of thought and expression.

In 2001, the word "health" was included into the mission statement for the American Psychological Association and I chaired a panel discussion on holistic healthcare at their annual convention. The primary focus was to describe a necessary collaboration of psy-

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chology with healthcare in which lifestyle plays a critical role towards physical and psychological healing. Whole person healthcare considers the individual within their personal context as well as the meaning of symptoms in conjunction with their biological and behavioral causes. Mind-body therapies offer an exciting and cost-effective healthcare frontier.

Psychologists are uniquely equipped to deal with stress and the effects of lifestyle interventions on self-care. "It can sometimes be hard for people to believe that relatively simple changes in behaviors, such as diet and lifestyle, can make such a powerful difference in our health and well being but they often do" (Ornish, 2007, vii). We can facilitate empowering individuals when "people feel more in control of their integrative treatment than of their mainstream medical care. This is a crucial and helpful dimension, since the essence of serious stress is helplessness – the inability to do anything about the stressor" (Spiegel, 2007, xii). The American public appears quite open for and eager to utilize holistic approaches. The enormous popularity of Bill Moyer's television series – "Healing and the Mind" – is a case in point.

The Taskforce will seek input from psychologists and other disciplines whose interests intersect with the mind/body approach and integrative healthcare. One of our initial tasks will be to focus on war trauma and assisting those who experience such distress to move towards healing and well being. We will create a training model/manual. We plan to coordinate our efforts with the Division of Clinical and Professional Practice of CPA and welcome your input and participation.



## References

Ornish, D. (2007) Foreword. In I. Serlin, "Whole Person Healthcare." (pp vii-xi). Westport, Conn: Praeger.

Spiegel, D. (2007) Preface In I. Serlin, "Whole Person Healthcare." (pp xi-xv). Westport, Conn: Praeger.

*Ilene A. Serlin, PhD, ADTR, is a licensed psychologist and registered dance/movement therapist. She is a Fellow of the APA, and has taught at Saybrook Graduate School, UCLA, Lesley University, and around the world. She is on the Board of PsycCritiques, The Journal of Humanistic Psychology, and the American Dance Therapy Journal. Her latest publication is a 3-volume series on Whole Person Healthcare (2007), published by Praeger. She has been on APA's Presidential Task Force on Whole Person Healthcare and is currently on the Div. 42 Task Force on Whole Person Healthcare.*

## Division I — Clinical and Professional Practice

Our mission is to support and enhance the practice of clinical psychologists in independent practice for the present and the future. The Division represents the needs of members by ensuring parity for psychologists with other health professionals while expanding areas of service delivery. Benefits of membership include advocacy programs; coordination with CPA's statewide grassroots legislative network; *Briefings*, a publication of Division I; the Expertise Series; and legal assistance. A major goal is to strengthen the role of psychology as a cutting edge primary health care profession and to support clinical psychologists in independent practice in becoming primary health care practitioners of the future.