

Nutritional Medicine as a Branch of Medicine: A Possibility or a Utopia? The Case of Cyprus

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My DProf project involves an action research programme aiming to transformation and change, within the Health Sector of Cyprus -including both the public and private divisions-. The main objective of my research is to build up adequate evidence to substantiate my arguments for the significant contribution of Nutritional Medicine in the prevention and treatment of chronic disease. National and international organisations, such as the European Commission and the World Health Organisation, raise strong concerns on the rapid increase of chronic diseases, while at the same time scientific research suggests that the most important risks for these diseases are closely related to diet and lifestyle habits. In addition, increasingly accumulating evidence confirms the fact that conventional medical practices have limited potential and capability to optimise the health status of people in the area of chronic disease.

The outcome of my project will take the form of a book which will offer: an introduction to Wholistic Nutritional Medicine including a review of the philosophical framework that supports its principles and methods of diagnosis and treatment; a critical appraisal of Conventional Medicine and the epistemological influences that underpin current medical practices; an analytical review of the work done by other researchers and scholars on the subject; an account of other countries' national health systems which offer integrated medical care to their citizens; work-based evidence derived from my work as a Nutritional Practitioner, aiming to strengthen my arguments as an advocate of Nutritional Medicine and evidence of the public opinion on the issue under research, derived from interviews and a survey. The ultimate aim of the book is to offer recommendations based on the findings of the project, for transformation and change within the Health Sector of Cyprus.

Action research, extensively used in the Health Sector worldwide as a qualitative approach of inquiry, aims to challenge, question and critically reflect on current practices, in order to promote changes that will benefit both the patients and the health professionals. A number of new methodologies have been developed during the last decades claiming to enhance the effectiveness and validity of action research. For this project I have selected Soft Systems Methodology, a holistic approach invented by Peter Checkland in the seventies, which incorporates systemic thinking in addition to analytical thinking. I consider this as a suitable approach to study and understand the complexity of critical interactions and interdependencies among variables within an area which consists of an amalgam of social, political and human elements.

My decision to undertake this challenging - under the current circumstances in the Cyprus Health Sector - project, was not taken without serious contemplation of ethical constraints and limitations posed by the fact of being an insider researcher within a professional area in which change might be resisted and new ideas disputed and disapproved by prevailing mentalities. My approach was designed to be amicable and conciliatory excluding antagonistic and defensive methods. My ultimate aim is to integrate and reconcile the existing diversity by constructing a conceptual model that will incorporate all viewpoints, needs and objectives of all groups involved. Noteworthy, Nutritional Medicine does not discredit Conventional Medicine as many other holistic approaches do. On the contrary it seeks symbiosis and synergy, placing the patient's benefit at the heart of all actions.