



Tibb and conventional medicine – *how do they differ?*

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Overview

Both Tibb and conventional (or *modern, allopathic*) medicine trace their origins back to Hippocrates, the 'Father of Medicine'. This medical philosopher/pioneer made the break from the magical and superstitious attitude to disease to a theory and practice of medicine based on scientific principles. To this day, the Hippocratic Oath is the cornerstone of medical ethics in conventional medicine. Other pioneers such as the Greek doctor Galen, the Arabic polymath Ibn Sina, the medieval herbalist Culpeper, and the 18th century physician Claude Bernard also contributed. Tibb philosophy is based on three fundamental concepts: (a) the existence of four *humours* (sanguinous; phlegmatic; bilious; and melancholic); (b) the nature of *temperament*, which details the uniqueness of a person according to his or her humoral composition; and (c) the idea of the administrator of the body, or *Physis*, which powers our capacity for inner healing.

For millennia, and until quite recently, both medical paradigms ran in parallel. They then parted company; one evolved into Tibb, and the other into conventional medicine. The pathways between the two disciplines initially diverged with the philosopher Descartes during the Renaissance. He advocated the dualism theory of separation of body and mind, effectively demoting the functions of the body to those of a 'complex machine'. Furthermore, he denied the roles of the mind and spirit in health and disease. Separation was complete with the influence of Pasteur and other clinicians who came up with their theory of specific aetiology. This claimed that virtually every disease arose from a single cause: a microbe. The previous holistic approach was rejected. This led to the "magic bullet" concept of disease, based on one cause; one microbe; one disease model of illness.

The main thrust of conventional medicine is to suppress the patient's troublesome symptoms. It is particularly effective in dealing with acute disorders (pain, inflammation, etc.) with powerful drugs and therapies. Addressing the underlying disorder is of lesser priority. For Tibb the main thrust is encouraging the patient's innate defence and healing mechanisms to deal with internal and external disturbances which lead, if not opposed, to a particular ailment. Tibb is supported in this by an awareness of the importance of lifestyle and personal habits. Tibb is therefore mainly, but not exclusively, appropriately suitable for chronic ailments.

This article deals with the differences between Tibb and conventional medicine under the following headings; Differences in Theory; Differences in Definitions; Differences in Diagnosis; Differences in Treatment; Differences re Integrative Medicine; Differences re Patient Involvement; and other Differences.

A. Differences in Theory

1. Tibb takes an holistic approach to the treatment of disease

- In Tibb, disease is the result of several negative factors coming together, bringing disharmony into the person's body, mind and/or soul.
- Alleviation of the disease therefore needs a multifactorial, holistic approach, based on lifestyle changes, active physical and mental therapies, and herbal medicines. The aim is to support natural inner healing.
- Tibb takes into account the physical, mental, and social factors in the patient's illness, rather than just the disease which has been diagnosed.
- Conventional medicine tends to adhere to the theory of specific aetiology: one disease, one cause.

2. Tibb is based on the theories of humours and temperament

- Tibb is based on the time-tested (more than 2000 years) theories of humours and temperament
- A person's uniqueness is based on the particular mix of the four humours.
- This difference is the basis of the diagnosis, treatment and recuperation from disease.
- It also influences the selection of a lifestyle which is consistent with optimal health.
- Conventional medicine only rarely takes into consideration the differences between people.
- Diagnosis and especially treatment therefore adopts a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy.

3. Tibb accepts that many diseases have a social or spiritual dimension

- Tibb accepts that there is often a powerful spiritual component to maintaining health and alleviating disease, and there is therefore a need to consider this when deciding therapy.
- Conventional medicine downplays or rejects any influence of spiritual or social factors in health and disease.
- Conventional medicine only accepts influences if they can be quantified with laboratory or other data. "*If you cannot measure it, it doesn't exist*".

4. Tibb keeps true to the Hippocratic tradition

- Tibb adheres to the principle of: "*First, do no harm*", which is a cardinal feature of the Hippocratic Oath. All Tibb treatments and techniques are consistent with this.
- Conventional medicine pays lip service to this, but drug treatment, by far the major intervention, is fraught with intolerable side effects and long term adverse reactions.
- Tibb accepts the Hippocratic advice of "*Assist nature*". All Tibb measures cooperate with Physis, our so-called inner doctor.
- Much of conventional therapy actually hinders or neutralises the power of inner healing. Antibiotic and steroid use and cancer therapy are present day examples.

5. Tibb is health focused, not disease obsessed

- The main objective of Tibb is achieving and maintaining realistic wellbeing and optimum physical activities.
- Tibb is prevention focused, rather than the conventional medical aim of curing a disorder.
- Cost-wise, it is much less expensive preventing chronic disorders than treating them when they arise.
- Tibb believes in adapting to the changing environment, rather than opposing it.
- “Adapt to the environment and maintain optimum functions”.

6. Tibb views the human body differently

- Tibb sees the human body as a highly adaptive and complex interacting system, probably beyond our comprehension. There are both physical and metaphysical aspects.
- Conventional medicine views the human body as a highly complex machine. Broken parts can be fixed or replaced by transplants, and different actions fine-tuned by drugs. There are only physical aspects.

7. Tibb regards each patient as unique

- Tibb recognises the individuality of each person in the form of temperament. This is a fundamental concept, relevant in the diagnosis and treatment of ailments, and the maintenance of wellness.
- Conventional medicine views all patients as effectively identical in metabolism, with a “one size fits all” approach to drug therapy.

8. Tibb accepts the body-mind interaction

- Tibb accepts the existence of a powerful, strong link between a person's physical and mental states.
- This linkage has major consequences in deciding anyone's state of health.
- Conventional medicine, however, rejects the existence of non-physical aspects of wellness, as they cannot be readily identified and quantified.

B. Difference in Definitions

1. Tibb differs in its definition of health

- Conventional medicine defines health simply as the absence of disease. It sees the human body as a complex machine, with replaceable parts, and any functions wearing out can be repaired by drugs or supplements.
- Conventional medicine relies heavily on laboratory parameters in its definition of “normality” as part of being healthy.
- Tibb sees health as the result of an adaptive dynamic harmony between the person's temperament (especially the genetic profile), the immediate environment, and the lifestyle adopted, especially diet, habits and other major lifestyle factors.
- Tibb sees harmonious connection between body, mind and spirit as necessary for optimum health.

- Tibb relies more on intuition and experience in its support of defining health.

2. Tibb differs in its definition of disease

- Tibb sees disease as the consequence of severely disturbed harmony, or homeostasis, in the body.
- This is due to Physis, the power of inner healing, being overwhelmed by faulty lifestyle, a hostile environment, self-destructive personal habits, and/or adverse genetic factors.
- In Tibb, physical, emotional, spiritual and social aspects may be involved.
- Conventional medicine views disease as a disorder with recognisable signs and symptoms and a specific cause which leads to abnormality or bodily dysfunction.

3. Tibb uses everyday language

- Modern medicine usually describes a disorder by translating the affected tissue and symptoms into Latin or Greek.
- Heart becomes '*cardiac*' and bone '*osteo*'. Inflammation becomes '*-itis*' and deficiency becomes '*-penia*', for example. The actual lesion underlying the disorder is not specified.
- The patient is understandably confused by this, and has no say in his diagnosis and treatment.
- Tibb however diagnoses a disorder in terms of qualitative or humoral imbalance.
- This makes it more understandable to the patient, and encourages input into subsequent treatment.
- For everyday disorders, conventional medical definitions are usually employed for patient convenience.

C. Difference in Diagnosis

1. Tibb does not rely on hi-tech diagnosis

- Tibb prefers empirical, traditional and time-tested diagnostic techniques, unless other techniques are essential in the patient's best interest.
- The temperamental and humoral theory allows for diagnosis at a practitioner level, without relying on extensive pathological and high-tech diagnostic procedures.
- Tibb may use quantitative data in support of a provisional diagnosis where there is uncertainty.
- Conventional medicine relies heavily on quantitative data, especially laboratory results, before making a diagnosis.

2. Tibb targets the causes of a disease by applying the basic theories

- Tibb applies the time-tested theories of humours and temperament in diagnosis
- A person's uniqueness is based on the particular mix of the four humours.
- This difference forms the basis of the diagnosis of disease.
- Tibb identifies this as humoral or qualitative imbalance.
- Treatment is therefore based on restoring healthy balance, or homeostasis.
- Conventional medicine usually sees disease as a breakdown in one or more mechanistic process.
- Treatment is based on restoring hormonal or neuro-chemical balance.

D. Difference in Treatment

1. Tibb treats a disorder by applying the basic theories

- Tibb applies the time-tested theories of humours and temperament in treatment
- Treatment is based on restoring humoral balance (homeostasis) in relation to unique temperament.
- Conventional medicine usually sees disease as a breakdown in one or more mechanistic process.
- Treatment is based on restoring hormonal or neuro-chemical balance.

2. Tibb treats both symptoms and underlying causes of an ailment

- Tibb relieves bothersome symptoms immediately. It then seeks to identify and correct the underlying causes of the ailment.
- Tibb differs from conventional medicine, which generally focuses on alleviating the symptoms troubling the patient.

3. Tibb is more suitable for chronic, recurring disorders

- Chronic disorders, compared to acute ones, make up most of the country's healthcare burden.
- Most chronic disorders arise from a faulty lifestyle over the long-term.
- Tibb focuses on rectifying a faulty lifestyle, with advice on food, breathing, exercise, sleep, emotional health and toxin elimination.
- As Tibb treatment is lifestyle-, not drug focused, it will not cause adverse reactions.
- Tibb treatment of chronic disorders is natural, patient-focused, and respectful of the force of inner healing.
- Conventional medicine provides effective short-term relief of symptoms with drugs such as pain killers, anti-inflammatories, decongestants and bronchodilators.
- Unfortunately, over the long-term, serious adverse reactions and unwanted metabolic effects occur.
- These unwanted effects need further drug treatment, and patient compliance is often low and unsatisfactory.

4. Tibb regards a patient's diet and lifestyle as first resort

- Tibb practitioners attach great importance to a person's lifestyle and habits in maintaining good health and avoiding or dealing with common ailments.
- Tibb practitioners are trained in lifestyle management, and regard it as the "medicine of the future".
- Conventional medicine is not inclined to offer detailed lifestyle advice; it is only a minor part of medical training.
- It does not attach much value to lifestyle changes, other than advising on diet, smoking and drinking habits.
- It therefore resorts to potent drugs, often as first resort, before lifestyle changes have been tried.

5. Tibb supports inner healing

- A major pillar of Tibb healthcare, identified by Hippocrates, is Physis, or inner doctor, which is the overall administrator of the human body.
- Physis is responsible for regulating all metabolic and other mechanisms which ensure our survival in the present, both as individuals and as a species.
- All Tibb therapy is designed to support or boost Physis – never to oppose or override it.
- Conventional medicine does not accept the existence of Physis, as it cannot be isolated and quantified.

- Conventional treatment often undermines the patient's Physis.

6. Tibb deals with microbial infection differently

- Modern medicine employs drugs as chemical warfare agents against microbial invaders.
- Microbes are attacked and inactivated by synthetic or semi-synthetic agents by disrupting their cell wall (bacteria, fungi) or their genetic material (bacteria, viruses)
- Tibb, however, relies heavily on Physis to rally the body's natural defence agents to isolate, inactivate, then eject, the offending microbes.
- Tibb also ensures that the patient's internal quantitative and humoral terrain is kept inhospitable to any microbes, by adopting a prudent lifestyle aided by Physis-enhancing regimental therapies.
- Tibb treatment of microbial infections is not prone to resistance build-up, unlike conventional drugs.

7. Tibb does not affect gut bacteria

- Antibiotics often cause havoc with the patient's gut bacteria, leading to super-infection by malign bacteria and fungi.
- Tibb therapy, whether lifestyle changes, diet improvement, or herbal or regimental therapies, does not disrupt the patient's microbiome.

E. Difference re Integrative Medicine

1. Tibb takes an integrated approach to a disease

- In Tibb there are no specialists.
- Tibb adopts an holistic approach, and sees the body as a complex of interacting organs and tissues.
- Tibb therefore treats the underlying disorder which has led to the disease.
- Conventional medicine sees the body as a machine with one part, an organ or tissue, needing repair when diseased.
- Conventional medicine therefore treats a disorder by treating the specific organ, etc., separately.

2. Tibb is compatible with African traditional medicine

- African traditional medicine (ATM) is the first medical call for most of the African population.
- Conventional medicine has been unsympathetic, dismissive, and often implacably opposed to ATM.
- Tibb has number of features in common with ATM – cultural practices (purging, cupping), value of lifestyle (food, sleep), the humoral theory, herbalism, and recognition of spirituality.
- Tibb is therefore well-placed to bridge the gap between the conventional medicine and ATM paradigms.
- Tibb is also a suitable option for patients seeking an “upgraded” version or “add-on” to ATM.

F. Difference vs Patient Involvement

1. Tibb is better tolerated

- Conventional medical treatment is firmly based on drug therapy, for both acute and chronic disorders.
- This exposes it to a wide range of troublesome side effects in the short term, and potentially serious adverse metabolic changes over the longer term.
- This lack of tolerance often leads to discontinuation of therapy, or to the need for additional drug treatment to counteract these side effects and reactions.
- Tibb treatment is much less prone to unpleasant or unpredictable responses.
- As Tibb therapy has been around for centuries, there is little chance of unexpected or unusual effects.
- Herbal medicine is usually less prone to side effects or adverse reactions.

2. Tibb is less prone to iatrogenic problems

- Conventional medicine is prone to iatrogenic problems, due mainly to poor tolerance and drug interactions.
- This often results in drug withdrawal from the marketplace, and sometimes severe litigation.
- Tibb therapy is based on lifestyle changes supplemented by traditional healing techniques and herbal medicine.
- Tibb therapy is much less prone to problems related to poor clinical practice.

3. Tibb is less expensive and less time-consuming

- Conventional medical treatment often demands constant laboratory- or physical monitoring of clinical progress.
- For chronic disorders this is both expensive and time consuming.
- Tibb is less inclined to need monitoring, as much of the clinical progress involves lifestyle changes.
- Tibb therapy usually involves repeated face-to-face counselling, and this encourages good patient compliance.

4. Tibb empowers the patient

- Conventional medicine assumes the doctor is the all-knowing authority, never to be challenged.
- Conventional medicine generally adopts a “top down” approach, in which the patient is placed in a passive role.
- A cardinal feature of Tibb therapy is that the patient is more involved in diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.
- In Tibb, the patient’s active participation in therapy is expected, and responsibility is encouraged.

5. Tibb therapy requires empathy from the healer

- In conventional medicine the doctor is emotionally neutral, detached and usually focuses on objective data only.
- In Tibb, care and empathy are needed to effect optimum healing and health.
- Tibb diagnosis focuses on subjective feelings and opinions, as well as symptoms and signs.

G. Other Differences

1. Tibb is not exposed to financial influences

- Tibb is not part of a formal trillion-dollar industry dominated by relatively few well-connected, multinational companies.
- The transnational Pharma countries have huge political power, and influence healthcare research, publicity, policy and practice.
- These companies largely control much drug research and are supported by conventional medical opinion-formers/leaders.
- Tibb is independent, but belongs to an informal network of natural medicine operatives, loosely connected, with little political clout.

2. Tibb has a constant healthcare message

- Tibb's message, theoretical basis and main practices have been generally consistent over many centuries.
- Conventional medicine, however, is constantly changing its advice, according to new information and different opinions.
- This can be confusing to both patient and practitioner.

Further reading

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