

**A Study of Psychoneuroimmunological Approach of Recovery from the Illness in the
Character H.F. in *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Denial Defoe**

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A good immune system is the indicator of a healthy human body. But in the present scenario, there are numerous factors in the world that depletes and destroys the human immune system and the human body is prone to get attacked with the diseases. There are numerous chemical supplements that are given to the human body during diseases; they are only to the organs of the body not for the mind and soul. These supplements are also out of use when there is an unavailability of proper supplements to the disease. Present condition of COVID-19 is similar where the world countries are struggling to find a proper medicine to control and destroy the disease. In such situations, the mind and soul are the energy boosters that trigger the immune cells and help the body to fight the disease. This concept of mind controlling the central nervous system and human immune system with the psyche is called psychoneuroimmunology. The present paper analyses the concept of psychoneuroimmunology in the character H. F. in the book *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Denial Defoe who faces similar a situation in London during the great plague.

Psychoneuroimmunology

Psychoneuroimmunology is the study of the interactions among the human psyche, immune, and nervous system of human body i.e the brain communicates with the immune system and neuroendocrine activity. Until 1970, the modern Western medical community thought that the immune system is functioning automatically without the influence of the parts of the body. Dr. Robert Ader in 1975 found out the existence of a link between the mind and the immune system which was later coined by him by the term Psychoneuroimmunology. The autonomic nervous system pathway and neuroendocrine activity generate signals that are perceived by the immune system via receptors on the surface of the lymphocytes and other

immune cells. Simultaneously, an activated immune system generates chemical signals (cytokines) that are perceived by the nervous system. These bidirectional pathways connect the brain and the immune system and provide the behavioral influences on immune functions.

Research of the late 20th and early 21st century indicates that there is a connection between strong emotions like fear, rage and anger and the strength of the immune system. When emotions are not expressed in a proper way there is an excess of epinephrine that weakens the immune system and causes susceptibility to disease. Under the stressful conditions the body produces cortisol that affect the human immune system. The immune system consists of three different types of cells: T, B and natural Killer and are collectively called as lymphocytes or white blood cells. These three helps in the development of healthy body against diseases. These three bodies are regulated by the Pavlov's method of conditioned response in a human body that develops the immune system when the body is prone to disease. This method is unknowingly used by the character H. F. in the book *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe to cure his illness from plague.

A Journal of the Plague Year

The book was published in the year 1722 which gives the detailed account of a character named H.F. during the great plague in London in 1665. The great plague had totally devastated the country and killed almost half of the population of the country. Defoe presented the book chronologically as the character H.F. is witnessing the consequences of the epidemic.

Psychoneuroimmunological approach of H.F.

In the year of 1665, the entire London was affected with the Great Plague and totally devastated the regular lifestyle of the people. It also suppressed the entire economy of the country where the upper class people somehow survived the epidemic and financial trouble but the lower class and the middle class cannot withstand the consequences of the plague. In order to save the people of England the government had taken too many efforts such as quarantining people, giving the medical supplements to the people periodically though the actual medicine was not found, giving health certificates to go out in case of emergency etc. just as it is prevalent in the present COVID-19 condition. One of the characters in London who got affected with the condition was H.F. He was a lonely businessman who resides in his empty house having little

person to help him. He believed and followed all the rules and regulations given by the government. He consumed all the medical supplements given by the government.

But I must go back here to the particular incidents which occur to my thoughts of the time of the visitation, and particularly to the time of their shutting up the houses in the first part of their sickness; for before the sickness was come to its height people had more room to make their observations than they had afterward; but when it was in the extremity there was no such thing as communication with one another, as before. (270)

In addition to the fear of death and plague he got super stressed with the conditions of the government. His tension rose to the peak when he visualized the death of his neighbors and the handling of dead bodies by the government. All these conditions acted as an added factor to cause illness in addition to the virus in his body. His condition got worsened within a short period of time. He could not go out of his house due to his illness. His condition got worsened due to his stress. He cannot cop up with the illness. When all the aids did not help his recovery, he turned his concentration towards god. His faith in god helped him in the recovery. Day by day he got cured and at the end of a week.

This is due to the reason that the anxiety and depression helped his immune cells to get depleted that made his body very fragile and open to virus. He was tired and sick also. When he turned his attention towards god, he transformed all his stress to faith and belief. This created positive energy in him where his nervous system and the endocrine system has reproduced the B, T and NK cells in his lymphocytes where his body naturally produced antigens to fight with the virus. This became the reason for his recovery from the illness without the medications “This is a world of corpses strewn in streets and pits, yet in the deadcart itself a drunken piper wakes up to cry, ‘But I an’t dead tho’, am I?’” (89).

Thus, in the crisis situations when nothing is there to help to fight the illness, this approach of psychoneuroimmunology can help as a life saving therapy. The positive well being such as being in positive hedonic states (happiness and joy), sense of meaning and purpose of life, positive evaluations of life leads to the absence of emotional distress that reflects in positive states and rise the immune cells in the body which fights the diseases.

I must trust to God for that; if I am taken, then I am provided for, and there is an end of me', and the like. Or thus, 'Why, what must I do? I can't starve. I had as good have the plague as perish for want. I have no work; what could I do? I must do this or beg. (26)

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