

## **Anthroposophical Medicine**

Anthroposophical medicine is a holistic health care system, not confined to sense-perceptible physical phenomena, but encompassing the whole person of body, life-forces, soul and spirit. It is rooted in science-based medicine and uses modern diagnostic methods and treatments and complements them with biologically-oriented medicinal products and methods that activate the self-healing forces of the human being. This whole-person approach also incorporates art, music, movement, and massage therapies as elements of collaborative, multidisciplinary health care. Anthroposophical medicine is based on the understanding that the human being is an individuality having a threefold nature of Body, Soul and Spirit. Wellbeing and healing are complete only when the needs of all three parts of the constitution are satisfied. It recognizes the deep connection that exists between the human being and nature.

### **History**

Anthroposophical medicine was founded nearly a hundred years ago by Dr. Rudolf Steiner (1861- 1925) and Dr. Ita Wegman (1876-1943). Steiner was an Austrian-born spiritualist, lecturer, and founder of anthroposophy. Anthroposophy (derived from the Greek words “anthropos”, “human”, and “sophia”, “wisdom”) is a philosophy that is concerned with all aspects of human life, spirit and humanity’s future evolution and wellbeing. The philosophy has roots in German idealism and German mysticism and was initially expressed in language drawn from Theosophy.

Anthroposophy postulates the existence of an objective, intellectually comprehensible spiritual world that is accessible by direct experience through inner development. It is a path of knowledge, service, personal growth and social engagement. With anthroposophy each individual spiritual seeker can develop a warm and will-filled means to overcome the alienation that seemed to be in Steiner’s view characteristic of Western modern consciousness. Steiner considered the purpose of the evolution of human consciousness, for which he regarded the incarnation of Christ as the central event, to be the attainment of human love and freedom.

The first steps toward anthroposophic medicine were made before 1920, when homeopathic physicians and pharmacists began working with Steiner, who recommended new medicinal substances as well as specific methods for their preparation. After studying empirical sciences, mathematics, and philosophy in Vienna, Steiner was commissioned at

the age of 22 to publish Johann Wolfgang Goethe's scientific writings in *Kürschners Deutscher Nationalliteratur* (German National Literature) and collaborated on the Sophie Edition of Goethe's works in Weimar. In 1902, at the age of 26, Ita Wegman met Rudolf Steiner for the first time. Five years later she began medical school at the University of Zurich, where women were already allowed to study medicine. She was granted a diploma as a medical doctor in 1911 with a specialization in women's medicine and joined an existing medical practice.



**Dr. Rudolph Joseph Lorenz Steiner**

Steiner was General Secretary of the Theosophical Society in Germany 1902-1912 but left that movement in 1912. He founded the Anthroposophical Society on December 28, 1912 in Cologne, Germany, with about 3000 members. Steiner believed strongly in the importance of Christian and Rosicrucian esotericism and in the spiritual dimensions of Western science. At the same time, he wanted to restore to them certain concepts usually associated with the East, including karma, rebirth, and spiritual evolution.



**Rudolph Steiner with Annie Besant 1909**

In more than six thousand lectures, Steiner described the inner etheric and other forces at work in both plant and human life. On this basis he advanced new methods in agriculture and medicine. He saw significance in color and music for health and wholeness and developed theories of education involving eurhythmics and a seven-year cycle of development. Those are implemented by the Waldorf or Steiner schools around the world.

Steiner also contributed to the theory of art, sculpture, and architecture. Those ideas are embodied in the Goetheanum, the headquarters building of the Anthroposophical Society. In 1913 at Dornach, near Basel, Switzerland, Steiner designed and built his first Goetheanum, named after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Steiner characterized this as a “school of spiritual science.” This building was destroyed by arson on New Year’s Eve,

December 31, 1922. Only the great sculpture of “The Representative of Humanity” on which Steiner had been working in a neighborhood workshop with the English sculptress Edith Maryon survived the fire.

Steiner designed a second building to replace the original that was finished in 1928. This building, now known as the Second Goetheanum, was wholly built of cast concrete. The present Goetheanum now includes two performance halls (1500 seats), gallery and lecture spaces, a library, a bookstore, and administrative spaces for the Anthroposophical Society. Neighboring buildings house the Society's research and educational facilities. Conferences focusing on themes of general interest or directed toward teachers, farmers, doctors, therapists, and other professionals are held at the center throughout the year. The Waldorf School movement, derived from his experiments with the Goetheanum, by the early 21st century had more than 1,000 schools around the world.



**The Original Goetheanum**



**Current Goetheanum**





**Dr. Ita Wegman in 1899 Berlin**

Dr. Ita Wegman is known as the co-founder of anthroposophical medicine. In 1917, after having opened an independent practice, she developed a cancer treatment using an extract of mistletoe following indications from Steiner. This first remedy, which she called Iscar, was later developed into Iscador and has become an approved cancer treatment in Germany and several other countries, and is undergoing clinical trials in the U.S.A. In 1921, Dr. Wegman opened the first anthroposophic medical clinic, now known as the Klinik Arlesheim, in Arlesheim, Switzerland. Wegman was soon joined by several other doctors. They then began to train the first anthroposophic nurses and therapists for the clinic. At Wegman's request, Steiner regularly visited the clinic and suggested treatment regimens for patients.

After Rudolf Steiner had opened the Goetheanum in Dornach, he asked Wegman to join the Executive Council. She also directed the Medical Section of the research center there. Steiner and Wegman wrote *Extending Practical Medicine*, which gave a theoretical basis to

the new medicine they were developing. When most of this book was written, Steiner was already terminally ill and Wegman cared for him.



Prior to his death in 1925, Steiner gave a series of lectures on anthroposophy and anthroposophic medicine. His many books are largely publications of his lectures. Some twenty works are generally considered fundamental expositions of his thought and essential to its understanding. They include *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* (German original 1904), *Theosophy* (German original 1909) and *Occult Science: An Outline* (German original, 1909). Wegman and Steiner co-wrote the first book on the anthroposophic approach to medicine, *Fundamentals of Therapy*.

After Steiner's death, difficulties between Wegman and several of the Anthroposophical Executive Council flared up and Wegman was asked to leave the Council. Additionally, she and several supporters had their membership in the Anthroposophical Society withdrawn. However, her medical work continued and in 1936, Wegman's clinic expanded and opened a second branch in Ascona, Switzerland. Wegman lectured widely, frequently visiting the Netherlands and England, and through her influence, an increasing number of doctors began to include anthroposophic approaches in their practices. Dr. Ita Wegman died in Arlesheim in 1943, at the age of 67.



**Dr. Ita Wegman**

In 1976, anthroposophic medicine in Germany became legally regulated as a specific therapeutic system ("Besondere Therapierichtung") by the Medicines Act- Arzneimittelgesetz (AMG) and by the Code of Social Law (Sozialgesetzbuch V).

Anthroposophic medicine is now practiced in both inpatient and outpatient settings by trained medical doctors. In the last few decades, numerous institutions throughout Europe specializing in anthroposophic medicine have opened their doors. These include hospitals, departments in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and other inpatient healthcare centers in Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Italy, The Netherlands, and the United States.

In Germany, three large anthroposophic hospitals provide accident and emergency services within the requirement plans of the German Federal States (Bundesländer). Two of them are academic teaching hospitals linked to neighboring universities that provide specialty training for physicians. One of the most renowned is the Filderlinik - <http://www.filderlinik.de/>.



The medical services of the Filderlinik include Internal Medicine, Psychosomatic Medicine for adults, adolescents and families, Surgery, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Anesthesia, Intensive Care, Radiology and Pediatrics, as well as a large outpatient and emergency department. A large team of artistic, movement, music and social therapists, and unique architecture make the hospital a very special place.

In 1983, the first private, nonstate university in Germany was founded out of one of these hospitals (University of Witten/Herdecke). In addition to the anthroposophic hospitals, there are more than 180 anthroposophic outpatient clinics worldwide in which anthroposophic physicians and therapists work together. Anthroposophic physicians also work in their own practices. A listing of anthroposophic hospitals and clinics in Europe is available from the **European Alliance of Initiatives for Applied Anthroposophy/ ELIANT** - <https://eliant.eu/en/key-areas-of-activity/integrative-medicine/hospitals/>



*The Filderlinik is one of the three major anthroposophic hospitals in Germany.*



In the United States, anthroposophic medicine has been successfully integrated into centers for chronic illness care and elder care, as well as a large variety of medical practices. Trainings in anthroposophic medicine are offered for health professionals in thirty-two countries on five continents.

Anthroposophical ideas have been applied practically in many cultural areas including the Waldorf and special education, biodynamic agriculture, beauty products and naturopathic medicines (Weleda, Wala Heilmittel), ethical banking (Triodos Bank N.V.), organizational development and the arts.

Today there are Anthroposophical Societies in 50 countries and smaller groups in an additional 50 countries. About 10,000 institutions around the world work based on anthroposophy. The Anthroposophical Society in America ended the year 2015 with 3,287 members. Anthroposophy Worldwide is the main international newsletter of the Anthroposophical Society.

The overall anthroposophical movement has had a significant influence through its educational work and the intellectual quality of many of its members. Steiner's own books are indispensable to understanding his life and work. His autobiography, was published in English as *Rudolf Steiner: An Autobiography* (1978). Other sources include Steward C. Eaton's *Man and World in the Light of Anthro-posophy* (1975), *Rudolf Steiner: Herald of New Epoch* (1980), and Robert A. McDermott's *The Essential Steiner* (1984).

## **Anthroposophic Medicine Philosophical Principles of Practice**

There are different ways to go about helping someone who is ill. Conventional medicine identifies symptoms and develops a treatment to suppress it. A bioregulatory medicine or anthroposophical approach is to understand how and why the symptom has come about and the way in which it expresses in that individual. Treatments are individualized to address the underlining causes. To do this, the physician must see the person as a whole-being and in the context of his/her environment. This is the approach used by anthroposophical practitioners, who attempt to understand their patients in terms of illness causation. They use this understanding as a basis for developing a holistic treatment that consists not only of medication, but also modification of diet and lifestyle, or simply creating space to listen to the person's concerns.

## **The Fourfold Human Being**

Basic to Steiner's doctrine was the description, in terms partly common to theosophy, of four levels of human nature. These are the physical, the etheric, the astral and the egoic. Each of these requires its own mode of knowing. Steiner uses the term "body" to describe the aspects of human existence that endure for a single lifetime. The physical body is the most obvious of these. Permeating our physical existence are forces of life, growth and metamorphosis that maintain and develop the physical body; as it is an aspect of a lifetime that falls away after death, Steiner called this the life body or etheric body. Steiner called that which receives sensory impressions the body of consciousness or sentient body. Steiner believed that human beings consist of four interrelating bodies:

- Etheric (life) body which is seen as the source of life and growth and contributes to physical shape; the etheric body gives the strength for growth, preservation and renewal as well as healing.
- Astral (feeling) body which governs the senses and enables the body to move and endows the human being with a soul.
- Ego (I) or the consciousness of self is the spiritual core and thus the highest level of organization that gives the human being purpose, meaning and guidance, and is what constitutes the individual personality.
- The physical body corresponds to the physically measurable body.

These four bodies interrelate within three distinct systems: the nerve-sense system, the rhythmic system and the metabolic system.

## The Threefold Human Being

In his book *Riddles of the Soul* (1917) Rudolf Steiner first proposed the idea of the *threefold* human being. Before him the German poet Schiller, and poet/scientist Goethe had developed similar themes. Understanding the concept provides a basis for comprehending anthroposophical medicine.

**Spirit:** anthroposophical teachings describe the human spirit as eternal yet becoming progressively more individualized and consciously experienced. Steiner believed that humans pass between stages of existence, incarnating into an earthly body, living a life, leaving the body behind and entering the spiritual worlds before returning to be born again into a new life on earth. In earthly life, the individuality or ego awakens to self-consciousness through its experience of its reflection in the deeds and suffering of a physical body.

**Soul:** anthroposophical teachings also describe a framework of consciousness that includes our set feelings, concepts and intentions. As each human soul evolves through its experiences, the earth itself and civilization as a whole also evolve. Hence, new types of experiences are available at each successive incarnation.

**Body:** Anthroposophy describes the human body not only in physical, anatomical terms but also according to functional considerations. In the physical body, Steiner differentiated three primary functional areas, each supporting a psychological activity:

- the nerve/sense system, primarily centered in the nervous system, supporting thinking and perception;
- the rhythmic system, including the breathing and the circulatory system, supporting feeling;
- the motor-metabolic system, including the organs below the diaphragm and the limbs, supporting willing.

When the four bodies are integrated with the human polarity of active motor movement and passive sensory perception, the three-fold constitution of the human being comes into being. It embraces three major systems: two being polar to each other (nerve-sense system

and motor-metabolic system), and one being intermediate (rhythmic system). These subsystems are spread over the entire organism but predominate in certain regions: the nerve-sense system in the head region, the motor-metabolic system in the limb region, the rhythmic system in the respiratory and circulatory organs and thus in the “middle” region.

The motor-metabolic system comprises all processes in the human body involving intense metabolic activity, such as digestion. Another characteristic feature of this system is regulation of thermal energy and movement. It is symbolized by the element sulphur with its fiery quality.

In contrast to this is the nerve-sense system which is associated with the central nervous system. With its qualities of coolness, rest and reduced metabolic activity it enhances clarity of consciousness and is seen as the direct opposite pole of the metabolic-limb system. Salt (sal), with its attribute of coolness, is the symbol of this system.

Two polar systems in the same body need a mediator. This role is carried out by the rhythmic system, which is associated with respiration and the cardiovascular system. The rhythmic system, symbolized by quicksilver (mercury), connects, transforms and harmonizes the external and the internal world, the metabolic-limb system and the nerve-sense system.

The rhythmic system is distinguished by its placement between the other two, polarized systems. Through the circulation of blood and through breathing, it connects with, and balances, both. We observe this anatomically and functionally. For example, the human heart muscle belongs to the metabolic-limb system through its enormous musculature and metabolic activity. At the same time, it is governed by electrical activity like that of the central nervous system. The nodes, the pacemaker of the heart, send impulses which affect the right and left chambers, stimulating heartbeat. In the heart valves we have a tissue not directly served by blood vessels, but rather nourished, by diffusion. In this tissue metabolic activity is greatly reduced, which also makes it prone to calcification at a certain age. Here we encounter diminished life forces again.

Anthroposophical medicine has a strong belief in the psychosomatic basis of illness. While the brain is acknowledged as the center of thinking, Steiner also believed that the organs of metabolism and the limbs were the bodily foundation for the life of will. Feeling is believed to arise through the interplay of the conscious thinking processes and the unconscious life of will and believed to be expressed directly in circulatory and respiratory functions.

## **Illness as Expression of Imbalance**

Anthroposophy sees illness as a healthy process in the wrong place or at the wrong time. For example, in the case of inflammation of the eye there is misplaced activity of the metabolic-limb system in the nerve-sense system. Loss of the state of equilibrium between the four constituent elements also leads to disruption of normal processes. The intestine is a good illustration of this. The complex processes of intestinal peristalsis depend on the right balance between the higher constituent elements (astral body and ego organization) and the lower ones (etheric body and physical body). A predominance of the higher



constituent elements leads to intestinal hypertonicity. In this context, abdominal pain is a “process of consciousness” in the wrong place, i.e. not in the free soul but attached to an abdominal organ. Conversely, insufficient engagement of the higher constituent elements in the lower elements results in atonicity.

## **Multimodal Treatment System**

Anthroposophic medicine pursues a holistic approach. Rather than focusing on a singular pathological datum, the aim is to strengthen the whole constitution of the sick patient, considering all dimensions: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social. Treatments therefore often are multimodal. They are individually tailored to synergize the effects of the different therapeutic components and so to enhance the chances for health improvement. Such treatment is conceived as a therapeutic system. Great emphasis is put on individualized healthcare.

Anthroposophical medicine applies medicines derived from plants, minerals, and animals, art therapy, eurythmy therapy, and rhythmical massage, counseling, psychotherapy, and specific techniques such as external embrocation. These therapies can be used as monotherapy or may be used in combination.

**Anthroposophic medications** are conceived, developed, and produced in accordance with the anthroposophic knowledge of the human being, nature, and substance and are sometimes potentized. The method of production is specified in the German homeopathic pharmacopoeia, in the Swiss Pharmacopoeia, and in the *Anthroposophic Pharmaceutical Codex* and follows good manufacturing practice. The medications are administered orally, rectally, vaginally, parenterally (intracutaneously, subcutaneously, or intravenously), or topically (applied to the skin, conjunctival sac, or nasal cavity). Several pharmaceutical companies produce anthroposophic medicines (eg, Weleda, Arlesheim, Switzerland; Wala Heilmittel, Eckwälden, Germany; Abnoba Heilmittel, Pforzheim, Germany). In anthroposophic medical practice, homeopathic and herbal medicine preparations are also used, in addition to certain conventional pharmaceuticals if appropriate.

**Eurythmy therapy** (In Greek, *eurythmy* means “harmonious rhythm”) is an exercise therapy involving cognitive, emotional, and volitional elements. Eurythmy therapy, a mindfulness-oriented movement therapy in Anthroposophic Medicine focuses on the relationship between life forces, the physical body, soul and spirit. In eurythmy therapy specific movements and gestures for the respective indication are taught to patients by the therapists. It is provided by eurythmy therapists in individual or small group sessions during which patients are instructed to perform specific movements with the hands, the feet, or the whole body. Eurythmy therapy movements are related to the sounds of the vowels and consonants, to music intervals, or to soul gestures (eg sympathy-antipathy). They are intended as expressions of e.g. music, speech and soul through the whole body.

Patients are guided to inwardly “feel” these movements and gestures. The aim of eurythmy therapy is to strengthen the overall energy resources of the patients and to stimulate somatic healing processes. Currently, eurythmy therapy is used for a variety of indications including e.g. diseases of the musculoskeletal system, the cardiovascular system,

psychosomatic diseases, and respiratory organs. It is used for both acute and chronic diseases. The effectiveness of eurythmy therapy in a therapeutic context has been investigated in several studies. This research involved single case studies, pre-post studies without control groups, and non-randomized comparative studies.

**Anthroposophic art therapy** was developed mainly by Margarethe Hauschka, who also founded the first training institution for this form of therapy in 1962. Anthroposophic art therapy employs the following techniques:

- **Sculptural forming:** Stone, soapstone, wood, clay, beeswax, plasticine, and sand are all used as sculpting materials.
- **Therapeutic drawing and painting:** The materials used include paints and brushes, chalk, crayons, and paper.

**Anthroposophic music therapy:** Instruments used include percussion instruments such as the glockenspiel, xylophone, cymbals, resonant wooden blocks, drums and kettledrums; various wind instruments such as flute, crumhorn, shawm, trumpet, and alpenhorn; string instruments such as the chrotta (a simplified cello), violin, viola, and double-bass; and plucked instruments such as the harp, lyre and kantele. Melodies, sounds, and rhythms are improvised with the therapist or simply listened to. The choice of instrument depends on the individual circumstances of the patient, according to the severity and stage of the illness.

**Anthroposophic speech therapy** involves using articulation, consonants, vowels, text rhythms, and hexameters. Breathing plays an important role in speaking (speech is formed exhalation). The indications for anthroposophic speech therapy are not only disorders of the voice but also general medical diseases, psychosomatic and psychiatric diseases, and learning and developmental difficulties.

**Rhythmical massage therapy** was developed from Swedish massage by Wegman, who was a physician and physiotherapist. Traditional massage techniques are augmented by lifting movements, rhythmically undulating or gliding movements, and complex movement patterns such as lemniscates and by using special loosening techniques from the deeper areas out to the periphery. In addition to effects on the skin, subcutaneous tissues, and muscles, rhythmical massage is believed to have both general effects (eg, enhancing physical vitality) and disease-specific effects.

**External applications** such as embrocation, compresses, hydrotherapy, and medicinal baths—are used as elements of nursing care and therapy to stimulate, strengthen, or regulate hygienic processes. For this purpose, etheric or fatty oils, essences, tinctures, and ointments are used, as well as carbon dioxide in baths.

**Psychotherapy** has been extended by anthroposophic perspectives to anthroposophic psychotherapy. Full training is available in different countries, and a master's/bachelor's degree in anthroposophic psychotherapy is available in Germany, The Netherlands, Italy,

and the United Kingdom. Counseling on biographical-existential, lifestyle, nutritional, social, mental, and spiritual issues is a central element of anthroposophic medical care.

Anthroposophic medicine is an example of a multimodal treatment system, based on a holistic paradigm of the organism, disease, and treatment, that has evolved into an evidence based bioregulatory medicine. Since its founding in the 1920's anthroposophic medicine has become a worldwide movement with institutions in a number of European countries.

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## Resources for Anthroposophical Medicine

**The IVAA (International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations)** represents and coordinates the national anthroposophic doctors' associations on both the European and international levels in regard to political and legal affairs.

<http://www.ivaa.info/home/>

**The AnthroMed Library** is a Repository Website for articles relating to Anthroposophic Medicine, sponsored by The Physicians' Association for Anthroposophic Medicine (PAAM). The site is currently maintained by LILIPOH Publishing, a source for additional articles on anthroposophic health.

<http://www.anthromed.org/>

**LILIPOH Magazine** - A quarterly magazine with a focus on anthroposophical health.

**The Physicians Association for Anthroposophical Medicine (PAAM)** was founded in 1981 and is the only physicians' organization which promotes Anthroposophic Medicine in North America. PAAM regularly sponsors lectures, conferences and educational events throughout the United States, and interfaces with other organizations interested in developing Anthroposophic Medicine. Its aim is to facilitate personal contact and exchange of knowledge between Anthroposophic health practitioners. PAAM is affiliated with the International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations and the Medical Section of the School for Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

#### **Rudolf Steiner Archive and e.Library**

<http://www.rsarchive.org/Medicine/index.php>

#### **Medical Section at the Goetheanum**

<http://www.medsektion-goetheanum.org/fehler404/>

**AWSNA** - Association of Waldorf Schools of North America is a nonprofit membership organization of independent Waldorf Schools and Institutes in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

## **Books**

Overview of Anthroposophic medicine. The System of Anthroposophic Medicine published by the International Federation of Anthroposophic Medical Associations.

Anthroposophic Medicine for the Family, an accessible guide describing many practical ways to support family health naturally; written by a physician from Milan, Dr. Sergio Maria Francardo.

Comprehensive 2006 review of efficacy, costs, and safety of anthroposophic medicine, with special comments on research methodology. Kienle G, Kiene H, Albonico HU. *Anthroposophic Medicine: Effectiveness, Utility, Costs, Safety.* Stuttgart and New York: Schattauer, 2006. ISBN-10:3-7945-2495-0 and ISBN-13:978-3-7945-2495-2.

## Articles

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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19545358>

## **Anthroposophical Pharmacies**

<https://www.weleda.com/>

WALA (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/271628469/WALA-Compendium-of-Medicines>).

Uriel Pharmacy Located on a small farm in rural Wisconsin, Uriel Pharmacy was founded in 1996 by Mark McKibben, R.Ph. to meet the needs of anthroposophically oriented practitioners and their patients. Uriel hand-makes natural medicines designed for the whole human being, using ingredients from their biodynamic gardens.

*The information in this monograph is intended for informational purposes only, and is meant to help users better understand health concerns. Information is based on review of scientific research data, historical practice patterns, and clinical experience. This information should not be interpreted as specific medical advice. Users should consult with a qualified healthcare provider for specific questions regarding therapies, diagnosis and/or health conditions, prior to making therapeutic decisions.*

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