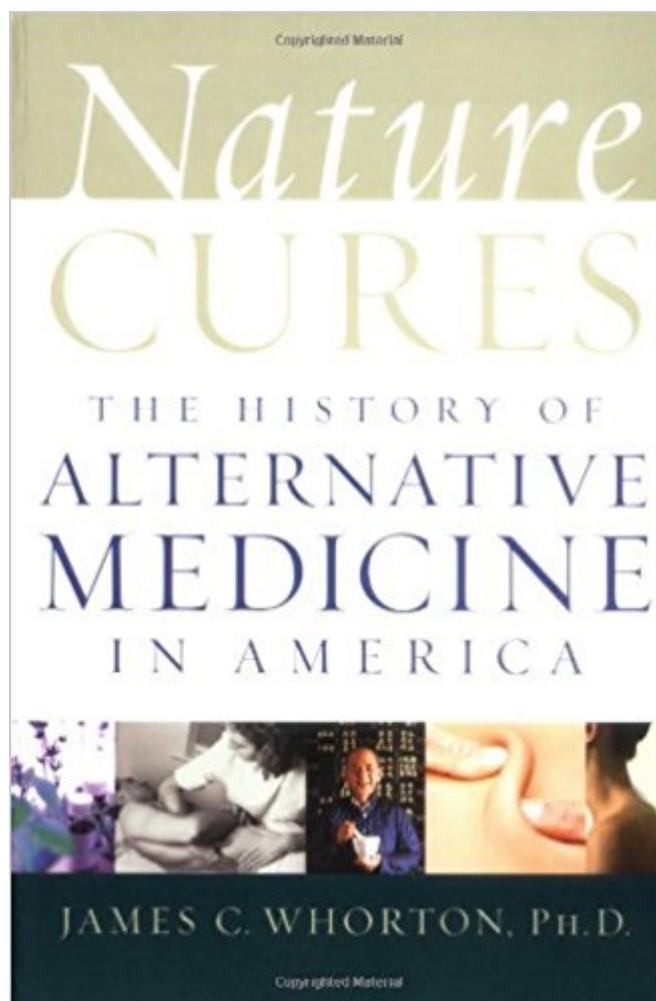


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Nature Cures: The History Of Alternative Medicine In America



Synopsis

From reflexology and rolfing to shiatsu and dream work, we are confronted today by a welter of alternative medical therapies. But as James Whorton shows in *Nature Cures*, the recent explosion in alternative medicine actually reflects two centuries of competition and conflict between mainstream medicine and numerous unorthodox systems. This is the first comprehensive history of alternative medicine in America, examining the major systems that have emerged from 1800 to the present. Writing with wit and with fairness to all sides, Whorton offers a fascinating look at alternative health systems such as homeopathy, water cures, Mesmerism, Christian Science, osteopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, and acupuncture. He highlights the birth and growth of each system (including European roots where appropriate) and vividly describes both the theories and the therapies developed within each system, including such dubious practices as hour-long walks barefoot in snow or Samuel Thompson's "puking and steaming" regimen. In particular, Whorton illuminates the philosophy of "natural healing" that has been espoused by alternative practitioners throughout history and the distinctive interpretations of "nature cure" developed by the different systems. Though he doesn't hesitate to point out the failings of these systems, he also shows that some "cult medicines" have eventually won recognition from practitioners of mainstream medicine. Throughout, Whorton writes with a light touch and quotes from contemporary humorists such as Mark Twain. His book is an engaging and authoritative history that highlights the course of alternative medicine in the U.S., providing valuable background to the wide range of therapies available today.

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Customer Reviews

Thorough, enjoyable, and rigorous, this study documents the major "unconventional" healing movements of 19th- and 20th-century America. Whorton (history of medicine, Univ. of Washington) traces the origins and influences of Thomsonianism, homeopathy, mesmerism, Christian Science, osteopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, and acupuncture, briefly discussing therapeutic touch, visualization, and prayer as well. The author also examines the rancorous history of medical licensing in the United States and leaves the reader with a sense that 21st-century healthcare will allow for a more conciliatory system of integrative medicine. He focuses on organized healing traditions and therefore does not examine the recent trend toward mass-market teas, supplements, herbal remedies, and other now-routine household therapies. This book fills a large gap left since the publication of Norman Gevitz's 1988 collection of essays, *Other Healers: Unorthodox Medicine in America*. Highly recommended for academic and public libraries. Andy Wickens, King Cty. Lib. Syst., Seattle Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Kindle Edition edition.

One of the bits of doggerel that James Whorton missed as he tracked the course of *vis medicatrix naturae* over the past two centuries came from the prolix pen of Oliver Wendell Holmes (from "The Morning Visit"): Of all the ills that suffering man endures, The largest fraction liberal Nature cures. None knew this better than Holmes's contemporary "irregular" practitioners of the healing art, some of whose theories Holmes demolished with overkill in "Homeopathy and Its Kindred Delusions" (Boston: Ticknor, 1842). The first third of James Whorton's history is devoted to the heyday of alternative medicine in the 19th century, a time when homeopathy, hydropathy, neuropathy, and magnetism were preferable to the mercury purges and bleeding of traditional medicine. In spite of their crack-brained theories, however, the so-called irregulars were ahead of the traditionalists in some ways: they welcomed women into their fold, they emphasized prevention, and they promoted sex education. Those physicians, who, like Holmes, abhorred the heroic "cures" of traditionalists were reduced to a therapeutic nihilism that militated against any placebo effect. None of this is new information, but Dr. Whorton has performed a service by bringing it all together in one place and in relation to the times. He is well prepared for the task, having written two previous books that cover the same period in different contexts. For the present book, in addition to many other sources, he has combed the files of 96 journals, including well-established medical journals, organs of current

alternative therapies, and those of historical interest, such as the Kneipp Water Cure Monthly. The object of Nature Cures "is to provide a perspective on the past that will serve health professionals of all affiliations in their interactions today." This Whorton does well. Elsewhere he states that "questions of efficacy cannot be answered by an historian." This is fair enough, but it opens up a gray area where Whorton's selective reporting can be criticized. However, in general he tries not to take sides. The book is easy to read and is sprinkled with amusing doggerel and wisecracks from Mark Twain, H.L. Mencken, and others. Readers may be surprised to learn that many folk maxims derive from the theories of 19th-century alternative medicine: "Starve a fever, feed a cold

A comprehensive and engaging overview of the fascinating history of the nature cure and the rise of natural therapies in a post-industrial era. A scholarly work written with passion and intelligence. I found this book essential reading on the history of the nature cure.

The value of this book to me is the historical context of the sometime strained relationship between natural medicine and "western medicine". History indeed repeats itself. Natural, alternative medicine grew out of a disenchantment with traditional medicine. As today, people began searching for answers other than what they were receiving from their doctors. The stories are informative and illuminating and really help one understand the chasm between the two worlds. I have not completed the book so I am simply at the stage of understanding the problem. I hope the book offers some type of solution that allows these polarized sides with similar hope for outcomes to work together on what might get us out of the healthcare crisis we are currently in.

Nature Cures presents the history of alternative medicine in America, showing that the recent rise of alternative medicine actually reflects two centuries of competition between mainstream medicine and unorthodox systems. In providing a running history of alternative medicine, author James Whorton enables readers to analyze the progress, successes and failures of both traditional and alternative treatments.

Vitalism is a profoundly science-ejected concept, though many CAM or 'natural health' cabals falsely claim that vitalism survives scientific scrutiny. I quote: "naturopathic medical practice nevertheless is still comprised of distinctive therapies backed by faith in nature [...] detoxification, like all other therapies, is meant to serve the more basic purpose of strengthening the vis medicatrix. Naturopathy still means trusting in nature to cure [...] 'confidence in the perception of

a vital force or life force.' Hence, today's hydrotherapy procedures are justified in terms that Lust, or even Thrall, would commend: hydrotherapy provides 'general stimulation of the vital force' [...] naturopathic medicine thus retains much of the old in its now 'science based natural medicine' [p.291]. "When is an article of faith unprofessionally / falsely labeled a medical scientific fact? Naturopathy.CAM: there be monsters here.-r.c.

The book was just what I needed, not in bad shape, and for a great price. Thank you!

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