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Concepts and a model for the comparison of medical systems as cultural systems

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Abstract

A model and related concepts are present for ethnographic and comparative research on medical systems as cultural systems. The major structural and functional aspects of the health care system model are briefly sketched. Clinical realities, explanatory model (EM) transactions in health care relationships, a distinction between disease/illness, cultural healing and cultural iatrogenesis, and the core adaptive tasks of health care systems are concepts based on this model which have practical clinical and public health, as well as research, implications. A number of hypotheses are outlined which can be used to focus medical ethnographies and to construct comparative cross-cultural studies of health care systems. The model, concepts, and hypotheses attempt to exploit medical anthropology's fundamental tension between medical and anthropological interests; and thereby to contribute to the development of theory that is original to this discipline.



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