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Preface to the second edition

It is now four years since I submitted the first edition of this book and it seemed time for an update. This second edition includes an additional chapter on the measurement of health status and quality of life (Chapter 14) and new sections on the following: professional issues in health psychology (Chapter 1), recent developments within the fields of health beliefs and social cognition models (Chapter 2), illness cognitions and health outcomes (Chapter 3), agreement in the consultation (Chapter 4), dieting and body dissatisfaction (Chapter 6) and psycho neuroimmunology (Chapter 10). In addition, it has been updated throughout. My thanks again go to my psychology and medical students and to my colleagues over the years for their comments and feedback.
An introduction to health psychology

Chapter overview

This chapter examines the background against which health psychology developed in terms of (1) the traditional biomedical model of health and illness that emerged in the nineteenth century, and (2) changes in perspectives of health and illness over the twentieth century. The chapter highlights differences between health psychology and the biomedical model and examines the kinds of questions asked by health psychologists. Then the possible future of health psychology in terms of both clinical health psychology and becoming a professional health psychologist is discussed. Finally, this chapter outlines the aims of the textbook and describes how the book is structured.

This chapter covers:

- The background to health psychology
- What is the biomedical model?
- What are the aims of health psychology?
- What is the future of health psychology?
- What are the aims of this book?
The background to health psychology

During the nineteenth century, modern medicine was established. Man (the nineteenth-century term) was studied using dissection, physical investigations and medical examinations. Darwin’s thesis, *The Origin of Species*, was published in 1856 and described the theory of evolution. This revolutionary theory identified a place for Man within Nature and suggested that we were part of nature, that we developed from nature and that we were biological beings. This was in accord with the biomedical model of medicine, which studied Man in the same way that other members of the natural world had been studied in earlier years. This model described human beings as having a biological identity in common with all other biological beings.

What is the biomedical model?

The biomedical model of medicine can be understood in terms of its answers to the following questions:

- **What causes illness?** According to the biomedical model of medicine, diseases either came from outside the body, invaded the body and caused physical changes within the body, or originated as internal involuntary physical changes. Such diseases may be caused by several factors such as chemical imbalances, bacteria, viruses and genetic predisposition.

- **Who is responsible for illness?** Because illness is seen as arising from biological changes beyond their control, individuals are not seen as responsible for their illness. They are regarded as victims of some external force causing internal changes.

- **How should illness be treated?** The biomedical model regards treatment in terms of vaccination, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy, all of which aim to change the physical state of the body.

- **Who is responsible for treatment?** The responsibility for treatment rests with the medical profession.

- **What is the relationship between health and illness?** Within the biomedical model, health and illness are seen as qualitatively different – you are either healthy or ill, there is no continuum between the two.

- **What is the relationship between the mind and the body?** According to the biomedical model of medicine, the mind and body function independently of each other. This is comparable to a traditional dualistic model of the mind–body split. From this perspective, the mind is incapable of influencing physical matter and the mind and body are defined as separate entities. The mind is seen as abstract and relating to feelings and thoughts, and the body is seen in terms of physical matter such as skin, muscles, bones, brain and organs. Changes in the physical matter are regarded as independent of changes in state of mind.
What is the role of psychology in health and illness? Within traditional biomedicine, illness may have psychological consequences, but not psychological causes. For example, cancer may cause unhappiness but mood is not seen as related to either the onset or progression of the cancer.

The twentieth century

Throughout the twentieth century, there have been challenges to some of the underlying assumptions of biomedicine. These developments have included the emergence of psychosomatic medicine, behavioural health, behavioural medicine and, most recently, health psychology. These different areas of study illustrate an increasing role for psychology in health and a changing model of the relationship between the mind and body.

Psychosomatic medicine

The earliest challenge to the biomedical model was psychosomatic medicine. This was developed at the beginning of the century in response to Freud’s analysis of the relationship between the mind and physical illness. At the turn of the century, Freud described a condition called ‘hysterical paralysis’, whereby patients presented with paralysed limbs with no obvious physical cause and in a pattern that did not reflect the organization of nerves. Freud argued that this condition was an indication of the individual’s state of mind and that repressed experiences and feelings were expressed in terms of a physical problem. This explanation indicated an interaction between mind and body and suggested that psychological factors may not only be consequences of illness but may contribute to its cause.

Behavioural health

Behavioural health again challenged the biomedical assumptions of a separation of mind and body. Behavioural health was described as being concerned with the maintenance of health and prevention of illness in currently healthy individuals through the use of educational inputs to change behaviour and lifestyle. The role of behaviour in determining the individual’s health status indicates an integration of the mind and body.

Behavioural medicine

A further discipline that challenged the biomedical model of health was behavioural medicine, which has been described by Schwartz and
Weiss (1977) as being an amalgam of elements from the behavioural science disciplines (psychology, sociology, health education) and which focuses on health care, treatment and illness prevention. Behavioural medicine was also described by Pomerleau and Brady (1979) as consisting of methods derived from the experimental analysis of behaviour, such as behaviour therapy and behaviour modification, and involved in the evaluation, treatment and prevention of physical disease or physiological dysfunction (e.g. essential hypertension, addictive behaviours and obesity). It has also been emphasized that psychological problems such as neurosis and psychosis are not within behavioural medicine unless they contribute to the development of illness. Behavioural medicine therefore included psychology in the study of health and departed from traditional biomedical views of health by not only focusing on treatment, but also focusing on prevention and intervention. In addition, behavioural medicine challenged the traditional separation of the mind and the body.

Health psychology

Health psychology is probably the most recent development in this process of including psychology into an understanding of health. It was described by Matarazzo in 1980 as the 'aggregate of the specific educational, scientific and professional contribution of the discipline of psychology to the promotion and maintenance of health, the promotion and treatment of illness and related dysfunction' (p. 815). Health psychology again challenges the mind–body split by suggesting a role for the mind in both the cause and treatment of illness but differs from psychosomatic medicine, behavioural health and behavioural medicine in that research within health psychology is more specific to the discipline of psychology.

Health psychology can be understood in terms of the same questions that were asked of the biomedical model:

- What causes illness? Health psychology suggests that human beings should be seen as complex systems and that illness is caused by a multitude of factors and not by a single causal factor. Health psychology therefore attempts to move away from a simple linear model of health and claims that illness can be caused by a combination of biological (e.g. a virus), psychological (e.g. behaviours, beliefs) and social (e.g. employment) factors. This approach reflects the biopsychosocial model of health and illness, which was developed by Engel (1977, 1980) and is illustrated in Fig. 1.1. The biopsychosocial model represented an attempt to integrate the psychological (the 'psycho') and the environmental (the 'social') into the traditional biomedical (the 'bio') model of health as follows: (1) The bio contributing factors included genetics, viruses, bacteria and structural defects. (2) The psycho aspects of health and illness were described in terms of cognitions (e.g. expectations of health), emotions (e.g. fear of treatment), and behaviours (e.g. smoking, diet, exercise or alcohol consumption). (3) The social aspects of health were
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Figure 1.1 The biopsychosocial model of health and illness

described in terms of social norms of behaviour (e.g. the social norm of smoking or not smoking), pressures to change behaviour (e.g. peer group expectations, parental pressure), social values on health (e.g. whether health was regarded as a good or a bad thing), social class and ethnicity.

◆ Who is responsible for illness? Because illness is regarded as a result of a combination of factors, the individual is no longer simply seen as a passive victim. For example, the recognition of a role for behaviour in the cause of illness means that the individual may be held responsible for their health and illness.

◆ How should illness be treated? According to health psychology, the whole person should be treated, not just the physical changes that have taken place. This can take the form of behaviour change, encouraging changes in beliefs and coping strategies and compliance with medical recommendations.

◆ Who is responsible for treatment? Because the whole person is treated, not just their physical illness, the patient is therefore in part responsible for their treatment. This may take the form of responsibility to take medication, responsibility to change beliefs and behaviour. They are not seen as a victim.

◆ What is the relationship between health and illness? From this perspective, health and illness are not qualitatively different, but exist on a continuum. Rather than being either healthy or ill, individuals progress along this continuum from healthiness to illness and back again.

◆ What is the relationship between the mind and body? The twentieth century has seen a challenge to the traditional separation of mind and body suggested by a dualistic model of health and illness, with an increasing focus on an interaction between the mind and the body. This shift in perspective is reflected in the development of a holistic or a whole person approach to health. Health psychology therefore maintains that the mind and body interact. However, although this represents a departure from the traditional medical perspective, in that these two entities are seen as influencing each other, they are still categorized as separate – the existence of two different terms (the mind/the body) suggests a degree of separation and ‘interaction’ can only occur between distinct structures.

◆ What is the role of psychology in health and illness? Health psychology regards psychological factors not only as possible consequences of illness but as contributing to its aetiology.
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What are the aims of health psychology?

Health psychology emphasizes the role of psychological factors in the cause, progression and consequences of health and illness. The aims of health psychology can be divided into (1) understanding, explaining, developing and testing theory and (2) putting this theory into practice.

1 Health psychology aims to understand, explain, develop and test theory by:

(a) Evaluating the role of behaviour in the aetiology of illness. For example:
- Coronary heart disease is related to behaviours such as smoking, cholesterol level, lack of exercise, high blood pressure and stress.
- Many cancers are related to behaviours such as diet, smoking, alcohol and failure to attend for screening or health check-ups.
- A stroke is related to smoking, cholesterol and high blood pressure.
- An often overlooked cause of death is accidents. These may be related to alcohol consumption, drugs and careless driving.

(b) Predicting unhealthy behaviours. For example:
- Smoking, alcohol consumption and high fat diets are related to beliefs.
- Beliefs about health and illness can be used to predict behaviour.

(c) Understanding the role of psychology in the experience of illness. For example:
- Understanding the psychological consequences of illness could help to alleviate physical symptoms such as pain, nausea and vomiting.
- Understanding the psychological consequences of illness could help alleviate psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression.

(d) Evaluating the role of psychology in the treatment of illness. For example:
- If psychological factors are important in the cause of illness they may also have a role in its treatment.
- Treatment of the psychological consequences of illness may have an impact on longevity.

2 Health psychology also aims to put theory into practice. This can be implemented by:

(a) Promoting healthy behaviour. For example:
- Understanding the role of behaviour in illness can allow unhealthy behaviours to be targeted.
- Understanding the beliefs that predict behaviours can allow these beliefs to be targeted.
- Understanding beliefs can help these beliefs to be changed.

(b) Preventing illness. For example:
- Changing beliefs and behaviour could prevent illness onset.
Behavioural interventions during illness (e.g. stopping smoking after a heart attack) may prevent further illness.

Training health professionals to improve their communication skills and to carry out interventions may help to prevent illness.

What is the future of health psychology?

Health psychology is an expanding area in the UK, across Europe, in Australia and New Zealand and in the USA. For many students this involves taking a health psychology course as part of their psychology degree. For some students health psychology plays a part of their studies for other allied disciplines, such as medicine, nursing, health studies and dentistry. However, in addition, to studying health psychology at this preliminary level, an increasing number of students carry out higher degrees in health psychology as a means to develop their careers within this field. This has resulted in a range of debates about the future of health psychology and the possible roles for a health psychologist. To date these debates have highlighted two possible career pathways: the clinical health psychologist and the professional health psychologist.

The clinical health psychologist

A clinical health psychologist has been defined as someone who merges ‘clinical psychology with its focus on the assessment and treatment of individuals in distress . . . and the content field of health psychology’ (Belar and Deardorff 1995). In order to practise as a clinical health psychologist, it is generally accepted that someone would first gain training as a clinical psychologist and then later acquire an expertise in health psychology, which would involve an understanding of the theories and methods of health psychology and their application to the health care setting (Johnston and Kennedy 1998). A trained clinical health psychologist would tend to work within the field of physical health, including stress and pain management, rehabilitation for patients with chronic illnesses (e.g. cancer, HIV or cardiovascular disease) or the development of interventions for problems such as spinal cord injury and disfiguring surgery.

A professional health psychologist

A professional health psychologist is someone who is trained to an acceptable standard in health psychology and works as a health psychologist. Within the UK, the British Psychological Society has recently sanctioned the term ‘Chartered Health Psychologist’. Across Europe, Australasia and the USA, the term ‘professional health psychologist’ or simply ‘health psychologist’ is used (Marks et al. 1998). Although still being
considered by a range of committees, it is now generally agreed that a professional health psychologist should have experience in three areas: research, teaching and consultancy. In addition, they should be able to show a suitable knowledge base of academic health psychology normally by completing a higher degree in Health Psychology. Having demonstrated that they meet the required standards, a professional/chartered health psychologist could work as an academic within the higher education system, within the health promotion setting, within schools or industry, and/or work within the health service. The work could include research, teaching and the development and evaluation of interventions to reduce risk-related behaviour.

What are the aims of this book?

Health psychology is an expanding area in terms of teaching, research and practice. Health psychology teaching occurs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level and is experienced by both mainstream psychology students and those studying other health-related subjects. Health psychology research also takes many forms. Undergraduates are often expected to produce research projects as part of their assessment, and academic staff and research teams carry out research to develop and test theories and to explore new areas. Such research often feeds directly into practice, with intervention programmes aiming to change the factors identified by research. This book aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to the main topics of health psychology. The book will focus on psychological theory supported by research. In addition, how these theories can be turned into practice will also be described.

The contents of this book

Health psychology emphasizes the role that beliefs and behaviours play in health and illness. The contents of this book reflect this emphasis and illustrate how different sets of beliefs relate to behaviours and how both these factors are associated with illness.

Chapters 2–4 emphasize beliefs. Chapter 2 examines changes in the causes of death over the twentieth century and why this shift suggests an increasing role for beliefs and behaviours. The chapter then assesses theories of health beliefs and the models that have been developed to describe beliefs and predict behaviour. Chapter 3 examines beliefs individuals have about illness and Chapter 4 examines health professionals’ health beliefs in the context of doctor–patient communication.

Chapters 5–9 examine health-related behaviours. Chapter 5 describes theories of addictive behaviours and the factors that predict smoking and alcohol consumption. Chapter 6 examines theories of obesity, dieting and
body dissatisfaction under- and over-eating and how eating behaviour relates to the individual’s cognitive state. Chapter 7 describes the literature on exercise behaviour both in terms of its initiation and methods to encourage individuals to continue exercising. Chapter 8 examines sexual behaviour and the factors that predict self-protective behaviour both in terms of pregnancy avoidance and in the context of HIV. Chapter 9 examines screening as a health behaviour and assesses the psychological factors that relate to whether or not someone attends for a health check and the psychological consequences of screening programmes.

Chapters 10–14 examine the interrelationship between beliefs and behaviour and illness. Chapter 10 examines research on stress and the relationship between stress and illness, and assesses the possible effects of stress on illness via behaviour change. Chapter 11 focuses on pain and evaluates causes of pain perception and the role of beliefs and behaviour in pain perception. Chapter 12 specifically examines the interrelationships between beliefs, behaviour and health using the example of placebo effects. Chapter 13 illustrates this interrelationship in the context of illness, focusing on HIV, cancer and coronary heart disease. Chapter 14 explores the problems with measuring health status and the issues surrounding the measurement of quality of life.

Finally, Chapter 15 examines some of the assumptions within health psychology that are described throughout the book.

The structure of this book

This book takes the format of a complete course in health psychology. Each chapter could be used as the basis for a lecture and/or reading for a lecture and consists of the following features:

♦ A chapter overview, which outlines the content and aims of the chapter.
♦ A set of questions for seminar discussion or essay titles.
♦ Recommendations for further reading.
♦ Diagrams to illustrate the models and theories discussed within the text.
♦ A ‘Focus on research’ section, which aims to illustrate two aspects of health psychology: (1) ‘testing a theory’, which examines how a theory can be turned into a research project with a description of the background, methods used (including details of measures), results and conclusions for each paper chosen; and (2) ‘putting theory into practice’, which examines how a theory can be used to develop an intervention. Each ‘Focus on research’ section takes one specific paper that has been chosen as a good illustration of either theory testing or practical implications.
♦ An ‘assumptions in health psychology’ section, which examines some of the assumptions that underlie both the research and practice in health psychology, such as the role of methodology and the relationship
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between the mind and body. These assumptions are addressed together in Chapter 15.

In addition, there is a glossary at the end of the book, which describes terms within health psychology relating to methodology.

Questions
1. To what extent does health psychology challenge the assumptions of the biomedical model of health and illness?
2. Discuss the interactions described by the biopsychosocial model of health.
3. Discuss the role of the whole person in health psychology.
4. What are the implications of health psychology for the mind–body debate?
5. Design a research study to evaluate the role of the biopsychosocial model in predicting an illness of your choice.

For discussion
Consider the last time you were ill (e.g. flu, headache, cold, etc.). Discuss the extent to which factors other than biological ones may have contributed to your illness.

Further reading
This paper discusses the problematic relationship between inequality and health status and illustrates an integration of psychological factors with the wider social world.
This chapter describes the different skills of a health psychologist, where they might be employed and the types of work they might be involved in.
This paper provides an interesting discussion about the aims of health psychology and suggests that rather than focusing on biological outcomes, such as longevity and cell pathology, researchers should aim to change behaviour and should therefore evaluate the success of any interventions on the basis of whether this aim has been achieved.
Maes, S. and Kittel, F. (1990) Training research health psychologists, *Psychology and Health*, 4: 39–50. This paper discusses the interrelationship between research, theory and practice in health psychology and focuses on the specific skills involved in being a research health psychologist.