

*Healing Language: A guide for physicians,
dentists, nurses, psychologists, social
workers and counselors*

by Rubin Battino, MS

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Rubin Battino, co-author of one of the most widely used clinical handbooks, is a familiar name to students of Ericksonian methodology. Based out of Wright State University, his work in the seemingly not so closely connected areas of chemistry and counseling provides him with a different perspective than most clinicians have. In various other works, Battino reaches beyond usual boundaries to explore the interface of the philosophy of practice with the art of life itself. This text demonstrates his aptitude for describing concepts in a logical, step-wise manner that makes complex ideas understandable.

Healing Language, an exploration of therapeutic communication, is a resource for individuals from a variety of helping professions whose words to a vulnerable patient/ client may leave a lasting impact. Based on the idea that communication can directly or indirectly affect the listener in a powerful way, Battino explores the concept that health care providers either promote or impede healing through their comments. Through reasoned discussions, examples, and philosophical examination of the potential effect communication may have on the unconscious direction of the listeners, Battino calls for professionals to pay careful attention to word choice and nuances in non-verbal communication.

Bringing in a variety of source materials, Battino examines the fundamental components of communication, exploring familiar principles such as the placebo effect as well as the nocebo effect (the opposite). In his explanations about word choice, he annotates concepts with supportive principles and explanations. For example, in a section on dealing with death and dying, he cites the well-known Kubler-Ross stages of grieving model and then adds to this platform by drawing in a lesser-known Three Stage Model. The latter, described in a 1992 book by Robert Buckman MD, (*How to Break Bad News*, John Hopkins University Press) places emphasis on the communication process, and provides a useful alternative to clinicians who deal in this area.

Drawing together basic principles, a framework is developed from within that a professional can self-assess and potentially learn new ways to enhance therapeutic communication. The methodology deals with both structure and form. It describes, in concrete ways, messages typically communicated between caregivers and patients; the potential positive or negative impact is explored, and in most cases, speaks for itself. Battino's commentary also provides direction and insight into the messages implicit in common gestures and non-verbal communication.

A good part of the book looks at situations likely to be found in the therapeutic context and uses scenarios with various response options as a technique to bring his ideas into the real-life arena. Such descriptions give health professionals pause to reflect upon their own style and the messages that are intentionally or unintentionally communicated.

Overall, this handbook is a useful guide to practice, even for a seasoned clinician. It deals with an important area of therapy that is generally under-emphasized, yet applies to every case, every situation, and every healing art. Battino's own succinct descriptions say it all (p 62) "In a sense, this book is about how to ethically use the placebo effect with words and attitudes".

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