Psychic Surgery in Philippines: Miracle or Fraud?

Psychic Surgery – Historic Evidence

In 1565, a Spanish Priest/Explorer Pedro Chirino describes the earliest reference to the therapeutic use of sleight-of-hand in the Philippines. Chirino writes, "He (the sorcerer) placed one end of the hollow bamboo upon the affected part while through the other end he sucked up the air; then, he let fall some pebbles from his mouth pretending they had been extracted from the affected spot." Chirino continues, "In times of sickness, these men were at there best, because in times of sickness they (the patients) were ready to venerate anyone who could give or at least promise to obtain a remedy for them." In 1588, an English explorer named Cavendish writes, "The priests of these tribes were known as Catalona in the North, and Babailan in the Visayas. They were the sorcerers or medicine men, and rude beyond measure was their art in curing, consisting generally of the imaginary extraction of pebbles, leaves, and pieces of cane from the afflicted part."

Psychic Surgery – Our Days

Psychic surgery is found in parts of Africa, South America and Indonesia, but only in the Philippines is it practiced in such a massive scale that it attracts foreigners. Many thousands of sick seemed to have made the trip, driven by the desperate hope that by some magic or miracle performed by the Philippine "healer " the cause of their decease can be removed.

What is psychic surgery? Jaime Licauco, a Philippino authority on the subject of psychic healing, describes it as: "a special process of healing performed by a spiritist group popularly known as faith
healers. The process usually involves painless, barehanded intervention into the human body, the removal of diseased tissues, tumors or growths and the closing of the incision leaving hardly any trace of the operation.”

In the book entitled "Into the Strange Unknown," written in 1957 by reporters Ron Ormond and Ormond McGill, are the first references to what would later be termed "psychic surgery." Ron Ormond used the term "fourth dimensional operations" to describe the paranormal healing work of Eleuterio Terte, whom Ormond refers to as a "fourth dimensional surgeon."

Ormond tells us, "A patient suffering from what had been diagnosed as a gall stone lay on the table, abdomen bared. Terte's thumb and forefinger of his right hand sunk out of sight into the flesh. As his fingers disappeared within the man, the choir commenced their singing, stopping only when the healer's hands emerged with the gall stone, which dropped into the waiting jar of alcohol." He continues saying, "In each operation, there was seemingly no pain, no bleeding, no open wound of any kind."

Overwhelmed by what they had seen, the reporters interviewed the patients. They told them that, "God had performed the miracle, using the man, Terte, as His instrument." Terte confirmed this observation saying, "I can do nothing unless the power of the Spirit Protector is within me." On their way back to Manila, the reporters discussed the amazing events they had witnessed. Ormond asked McGill, "What is your verdict?" McGill replied, "Either that man is working miracles or he's the greatest magician that ever lived."

In conclusion Ron Ormond summarized, "I, and McGill, still don't know what to think; but we have motion pictures to show it wasn't the work of any normal magician, and could very well be just what the Filipinos said it was – a miracle of God performed by a fourth dimensional surgeon."

Lacking any understanding of the religious beliefs and spiritual practices of the "fourth dimensional surgeons," well meaning but misinformed parapsychologists, attempted to define what they had witnessed. The very term "psychic surgery" coined by the writer Harold Sherman, inferred that the spiritual healing practices of the Filipinos, derived from their religious practices, were equivalent in some way to the surgical procedures of Western medicine.

This supposition aroused the ire of Western doctors and set into motion a concerted effort on the part of the Western medical profession to prove that "psychic surgery" was a fraudulent and deceitful form of medical quackery. On close examination, it became apparent that in addition to the genuine miracles that had been thoroughly documented, some of the "psychic surgeons" were simulating the "operations" with a sophisticated and innovative form of sleight-of-hand.
Debunking Hoax

How genuine is psychic surgery? There is ample evidence that this type of “healing” is dangerous. The promoters of psychic surgery prey upon and exploit the frustrations, the hopes and the longings of the seriously ill.

In 1974, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Senate Subcommittee on Health and Long Term Care held hearings on psychic surgery. In these hearings, the FTC heard the testimonies of 48 witnesses and reviewed 134 exhibits. According to these witnesses, the Filipino healers had defrauded their patients by palming small plastic bags, which contained blood and tissue. The witnesses maintained that the Filipino healers were defrauding their patients by producing these plastic bags in sleight-of-hand simulations of surgery. Working from the premise that Filipino healers were impersonating surgeons, thereby practicing medicine illegally, police began setting up sting operations in order to prosecute them.

In a 1974 lawsuit, the Federal Trade Commission also challenged the advertising ethics and practices of a number of US travel agencies promoting psychic surgery. The court prohibited four travel agencies and seven individuals from promoting and selling trips to the Philippines for “psychic surgery.” It was found to be pure “fakery” and “a fraud accomplished by the deception and trickery of the ‘psychic surgeons’ “. The respondent travel agencies were also required to send a warning to all people who had purchased trips from them for “psychic surgery.”

In 1984, Congressional hearings chaired by Claude Pepper reviewed the files of five governmental agencies. These agencies included the FTC, American Cancer Society, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health & Human Sciences, and The American Medical Society. This four-year review led to the conclusion that they ‘could find no evidence that psychic surgery was effective.’
In 1986, the arrest and prosecution of psychic surgeons began in earnest. Gary and Terry Magno were arrested in Phoenix, Arizona, and charged with the fraudulent practice of medicine. They posted bail and immediately fled back to the Philippines. In 1987, Jose Bugarin was arrested in Sacramento, California, for cancer quackery, illegal practice of medicine. He was sentenced to nine months in prison. In 1989, Placido Palitayan was arrested and prosecuted in Oregon for the illegal practice of medicine. In 1991, immigration officials arrested Terry Magno in the Philippines, and deported her back to the United States to stand trial. Mrs. Magno faced 17 counts of fraud and one of conspiracy in connection with the 1986 charges of practicing psychic surgery in Arizona.

**Placebo Effect**

While the persecution of the Filipino healers was getting into gear, the Institute of Noetic Sciences published a report on aspects of the placebo effect that were known only to a select group of medical researchers. One of the topics covered in the report was the little known subject of placebo surgery. In the 1950s, several American doctors conducted an experiment designed to determine the merits of the surgical procedure for angina pectoris. In the experiment, three of five patients received the operation. The other two were merely placed under anesthesia, and given a surface incision, which was then sutured. Once awakened, the five patients were monitored during their recovery from the operations. To the amazement of the physicians, a significant percentage of the patients who had received placebo operations were cured. In 1961, Dr. Henry Beecher reviewed two double-blind studies of the placebo operations. These studies convincingly demonstrated that the actual operation produced no greater benefit than the placebo operation. In a separate study conducted by Dr. Leonard Cobb and his associates, placebo surgery proved to be more effective than the real thing. Cobb reported that fully 43% of the patients who received placebo surgery reported both subjective and objective improvement. In the patients who had received the real operation, only 32% reported satisfactory results. What this research established is that the mere form (metaphor) of surgical procedures can produce the same results as the actual surgical procedures.

**Conclusion**

Check the video, debunking the fraud:

In spite of the scientific evidence that the psychic surgery is a fraud, there is still a big question how come it has gained so much popularity among civilized and educated Europeans and Americans. Only because of the last chance hope? Or there were indeed multiple cases presenting the factual evidence of miraculous curing? Can everything be explained by the placebo effect?

Having critical mind, I do not believe in miracles. But, if there was many people, who get better from this procedure, no matter what it was – real miracle or placebo – maybe, just maybe, there is something more than old magician tricks? Definitely, we should not put terminally ill patients in arms of the medical fraudsters, but how we can keep their hope for miraculous recovery alive?
What do you think?

Sources and Additional Information:
http://www.metamind.net/enigmaipsysur.html
http://www.benatural.org/psychic-surgery.html