

**Włodzimierz Piątkowski, *Beyond Medicine.
Non-Medical Methods of Treatment in Poland***
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In 2012, Peter Lang published a book by Włodzimierz Piątkowski *Beyond Medicine. Non-Medical Methods of Treatment in Poland*. The author is a medical sociologist and the expert on the issues discussed in his work; he has been studying these issues for over 20 years, regularly publishing new developments and analyses in the field of non-conventional medicine.

The reviewed publication has 307 pages, and it starts with *Preface* by Beata Tobiasz-Adamczyk, the author's *Acknowledgements* and *Introduction*, in which the author claims that thanks to sociological analyses of non-conventional methods of treatment it is possible improve our understanding and our research on broader social problems such as health awareness, attitudes towards health and sickness, health needs or laypeople's health behavior.

The book consists of 3 parts. The first one is a sociological analysis of non-medical treatment in Poland and other—not only European—countries. It is a sociological basis for the characteristics of folk medical systems, self-treatment and healers' activities in Poland, presented in the next parts of the publication.

In the second part, the author describes folk medical systems and self-treatment in Poland. He begins with explaining the methodological difficulties which pose problems for any researchers analyzing the phenomenon discussed. Next, he presents the social framework of self-treatment and folk medical systems in the late 19th and early 20th century. Provides characteristics of rural people's health condition, typical behavior during illness and its conditioning (e.g. political, economic, cultural and religious ones). The author also raises the subject of the role of women, who often play an important role in self-treatment carried out in families. It's an interesting and important issue, which is rarely discussed in the context of health- and illness-related activities, especially in the Euro-American culture.

Włodzimierz Piątkowski argues “that the historical perspective allows the medical sociologist to understand more thoroughly the social phenomena that he describes and interprets, which is why this interpretation was adopted in my own research, especially in the studies of self-treatment and folk medical systems.” It is not pos-

sible to study contemporary sociological phenomena without studying the historical conditions. Still, secondary sources are a valuable source for a sociologist studying not only non-medical treatment, but also other problems. This approach justifies the author's extensive characteristics of rural people's health now and in the past. For centuries, rural people accounted for a significant percentage of population in Poland. The countryside was a place where practices of non-medical treatment were always very popular. This part includes a deep analysis of behavior conditioning during illness. Among macrosocial determinants, Włodzimierz Piątkowski described the issues related to social policy, economics, culture and religion. According to the author, mesosocial determinants include the attitude to medical institutions and professions, and microsocial ones—nutritional patterns, housing conditions, hygienic habits and psychosocial factors.

The third part, entitled “Therapies of modern healers” presents—in my opinion—three very important issues. Firstly a sociological description of non-professional methods of fulfilling health needs. Secondly, discuss the problem from the theoretical perspective, referring to sociological theories—such as symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology—and to Eliot Freidson's views. The analysis in this part presents non-medical treatment not only as one of the issues examined within one of the subdisciplines of sociology—i.e. the sociology of health, illness and medicine—but also as an issue which should be analyzed from the perspective of general sociology. This part also includes a short description of the author's own research concerning this problem. The last subchapter contains an apparently apt description of the phenomenon of Anatolij Kaszpirowski's teletherapy, which won massive popularity among the viewers at the beginning of the 90's. Włodzimierz Piątkowski not only provided a description and characteristics of the phenomenon—which could be called “Kaszpirowski's phenomenon”—but he also presented it against the background of the social changes connected with the transformation of political system in Poland at the beginning of the 90's.

The issues raised in the reviewed book are important, considering the enormous popularity of “alternative medicine” therapists and services—the subject of numerous Polish and English resources. It should be emphasized that the monograph *Beyond Medicine. Non-Medical Methods of Treatment in Poland* is one of few books giving a deep insight into the problem, from the perspective of both general sociology and the sociology of health and illness.

The issues connected with non-professional methods of treatment frequently raise interest of many sociologists concerned with various subdisciplines. This is reflected both in publications and topics covered during sociological conferences.

Dictionary of Medical Sociology, containing the most important entries from this subdiscipline, includes a few terms related to alternative medicine. These are e.g. alternative health care practitioners, chiropractice, Curandoro activity (healers in South America), healers, folk healers, homeopathic medicine (Cockerham 1997).

Polish literature on medical sociology includes numerous publications on non-medical treatment. Magdalena Sokołowska in her book *Granice medycyny* [The Limits

of Medicine] widely discusses the problem of the development of medicine, which actually eliminated various earlier forms of treatment and care but did not suggest any other activities instead. She also emphasizes the importance of the 1978 WHO report recommending undertaking holistic research on traditional medicine (1980: 252–273). In her handbook, *Socjologia medycyny* [Sociology of Medicine], she highlights the increasing importance of various “alternative forms of help” in illness and the popularity of different healers (Sokołowska 1986: 82). In the late 80’s and early 90’s Piątkowski published two monographs on the subject of non-medical treatment. In *Spotkania z medycyną* [Encounters with Medicine] he presented a historical perspective on alternative forms of treatment, up to 20th century (Piątkowski 1990). In 1993 *Listy do Kaszpirowskiego: spojrzenie socjologiczne* [Letters to Kaszpirowski: Sociological Perspective] was published, presenting a quality and quantity analysis of the first part of the letters sent by the viewers, who—on public television’s request—expressed their opinions on broadcast therapeutical sessions of this popular healer (Piątkowski, Jezior, Ohme 1993). Another publication in the field of medical sociology, from 1998, includes a part on non-medical treatment, consisting of texts by 7 authors (Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, Ogryzko-Wiewiórowska, Piątkowski 1998: 15–134). Next publications on the sociology of health, illness and medicine contain Włodzimierz Piątkowski’s works, where he analyzes non-medical treatment from different perspectives (Barański, Piątkowski 2002: 235–242; Piątkowski 2009: 311–338). It is also worth mentioning that Bożena Płonka-Syroka’s chapter *Medycyna alternatywna w perspektywie antropologii historycznej* [Alternative Medicine from the Perspective of Historical Anthropology] was included in the first monograph on the subject of the cooperation between sociology and medical anthropology (2008: 315–338).

Anthony Giddens stresses the importance of a social problem, which is using alternative methods of treatment. He wrote e.g. that “in modern societies, there is an upsurge in popularity of alternative—not included in official medicine or just partly conforming to it—forms of healthcare” (2007: 165). Moreover, he indicates the changes in attitude to health in Western societies, which are also taking place in Poland. People are getting more and more interested in their health, prevention of disease, and they have greater health awareness; so when ailments appear, they want to have influence on decisions regarding the way of treatment (Giddens 2007: 166). Giddens puts forward a thesis that the role of alternative medicine will increase, and because of “the development of alternative medicine, there are many interesting questions that sociologists have to answer” (2007: 166).

Non-medical treatment is the issue often covered by the authors of books on the sociology of health, illness and medicine, written in English. Most publications include the issue of a growing interest in alternative methods of treatment, which is being observed in the Western societies. The reason for that is seen in the domination of biomedical model of patient care, which does not pay enough attention to the patient’s psychological problems and social situation. Another frequently raised subject is the risk resulting from delaying or resigning from contacting a physician or undergoing a suggested therapy. This problem is mentioned by Sarah Nettleton (2007: 217–221),

William Cockerham (2010: 208–225), Graham Scambler (2003: 45–46), Gregory Weiss and Lynne Lonnquist (2009: 226–251) and Michael Goldstein (2000: 284–297).

The books listed above contain separate extensive chapters on non-medical treatment. It should be remembered that this issue is also covered by scientific magazines—which may be proven by the result of searching Scopus database, which contains natural, engineering, medical and social sciences articles. If we search for the articles containing the phrase “complementary and alternative medicine” in the title, synopsis or key word, we receive 17,000 results.

The fact that “the sociology of non-medical treatment” has a well-established position within the framework of the sociology of health, illness and medicine can also be seen in the programs of congresses of the sociology of medicine of European Society for Health and Medical Sociology and sociological congresses in Poland. This issue has been frequently raised in discussions and evoked the participants’ wide interest.

Finally, it’s worth stressing—what the author mentions in the book—the WHO’s recommendation to carry out regular clinical-epidemiological research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

The last decades in Poland saw dynamic changes not only in its political system and economy, but also in the people’s lifestyle and everyday behavior, including pro- and anti-health behavior, and the people’s attitude towards their own bodies. It has also been a period of development in biomedicine and introduction of methods and therapies of treatment of non curable diseases. On the other hand, almost every day the media reveal malpractice or behavior disgraceful for the doctor’s profession, which impairs the society’s trust in this profession (it is confirmed by the results of surveys). These factors can contribute to a growing interest in self-treatment or healers’ practices. In his book, Włodzimierz Piątkowski, following Sarah Nettleton, quotes other factors which can be considered the reason for the development of non-medical treatment, such as: the promotion of alternative medicine in the media, the rise of consumer movement, the trendiness of ‘natural’ and ecological lifestyle, the spreading cult of healthy and beautiful body. The author also widely discusses the issue of folk medical systems. As a result, the reader is provided with a whole picture of the reasons and popularity of these three forms of non-professional attitude to treatment.

I would like to highlight extensive and varied material collected by Włodzimierz Piątkowski, i.e. both the author’s own research and the widely discussed Polish and foreign literature on non-medical treatment.

The reviewed book is an important publication in the literature on the sociology of health, illness and medicine, as it provides a whole and systematic analysis of one of the important areas in this subdiscipline. It is a precursory publication which has not only scientific value, but which is also a valuable source in didactics of the sciences of behavior. The group of readers of the book should be large—both students and academic employees as well as specialists in different academic sciences. Moreover, it can be useful for medical staff, who every day deal with behavior related to non-medical treatment, or the consequences of non-medical treatment.

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Antonina Doroszevska (Ph.D.)
 Medical University of Warsaw
 E-mail: a.doroszevska@gmail.com