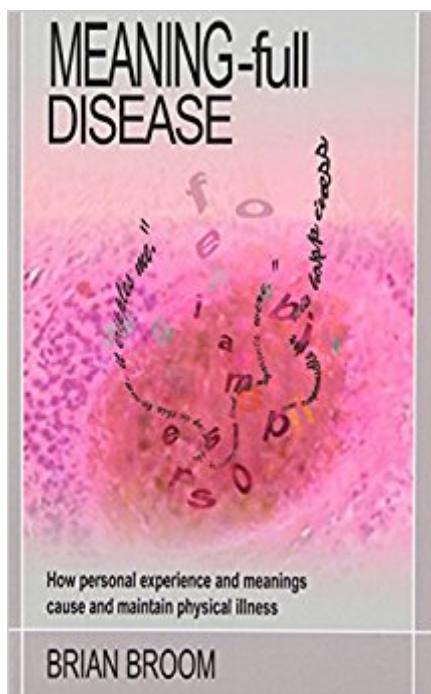


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# Meaning-Full Disease: How Personal Experience And Meanings Cause And Maintain Physical Illness



## Synopsis

This book is about the nature of meaning, the relationship of meaning to the body, and the way in which meaning expresses itself in our health or lack of it. In another way it is about the conjunction of mind, body, and spirit. In a more practical perspective, the message is that meaning-full disease does make sense, that we do have a sound basis for a holism that includes meaning, and that we had better sort out our models of healthcare if we want to be the sorts of clinicians and healers our patients and clients deserve.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Using stories from patients' lives and embellishing them through personal insights and the writings of clinicians, authors and philosophers, Dr Broom breaks through the constraints of traditional biomedicine and opens the door to truly understanding the personal meaning of illness and disease. This book is a valuable addition for those who are open to acquiring insights into mind-body interactions." (Douglas A. Drossman, MD, Professor of Medicine and Psychiatry, Co-Director,) "Professor Broom has long been at the forefront of mind-body health issues in New Zealand and was instrumental in establishing The MindBody Trust. He has given us what is quite simply a superb book, arising as it does from his commitment to a most honest, rigorous and integrated understanding of the personhood of his patients and the frameworks through which their disease processes and histories are interpreted. He explores issues that are problematic in our current viewpoints about human health and offers a much more coherent understanding of illness and its resolution that encompasses all aspects of what it is to be human. This very approachable

book deserves to be very widely read and should be essential reading for all medical and other health practitioners, and biomedical scientists. (Associate Professor, Roger Booth, Academic Director, School of Medical Sciences)

Brian Broom is Adjunct Professor at the Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, and leads the post-graduate program in MindBody Healthcare. His other book is *Somatic Illness and the Patient's Other Story: A Practical Integrative Mind/Body Approach to Disease for Doctors and Psychotherapists*. He works as consultant physician (allergy and clinical immunology), psychotherapist, and mindbody specialist, at the Arahura Health Centre, Christchurch, New Zealand.

As unassuming as the description is, this is an important book by an equally unassuming and important thinker and health practitioner. Dr Broom is my lecturer in my Postgraduate Diploma in Mind-Body Healthcare course, at Auckland University of Technology, and I have come to know him as a man of immense compassion, wisdom and profundity. In this easy-to-read text, Brian Broom asserts that much of today's illness is the expression of "stories" - events in a person's life that took on particular meanings but somehow couldn't be expressed, except as symptoms of disease. From his 30 years of medical practice and teaching, he offers his observations and insights into patients who do not respond to medical treatment; yet get better when their stories are finally heard. Ultimately the book is about "the nature of meaning, the relationship of meaning to the body, and the way in which meaning expresses itself in our health or lack of it." Yet, unlike other "meanings of diseases" authors, he refrains from presenting an encyclopedia of specific meanings for specific diseases (a la Louise Hay). That is too simplistic for him; too dualistic, and too patronizing. No, no one can know the meanings of our illnesses but ourselves, for we have experienced and interpreted life in unique ways. Yet it often needs a space, created by a caring practitioner, for us to get in touch with our stories. Drawing on Phenomenology and the work of Georg Groddeck (1866-1934), Broom takes us through case after case of patients expressing allergies, migraines, psoriasis, inexplicable bleeding from genitals and breasts; and shows how through attentive listening, their stories have revealed the stunning way in which mind and body interact. He talks of somatic metaphors, in which the body symbolically expresses the mind - such as the case of Eunice, who suffered thickening of abdominal skin when she, in her words, "withdrew into my shell" after a shocking experience. Broom explores the connection between language and disease; how disease may be a person's form of communication; and how meaning may only be

found when the practitioner looks for it. He also discusses phenomenology as a philosophical response to the limitations of the Cartesian worldview; and Western and Japanese approaches to the "subject-body" as opposed to the materialistic "object-body." Broom argues that doctors have tragically forgotten how to listen to patients, instead treating them as objects rather than experiencing beings. They have divided patients into Mind and Body, and only treat the body. This dualistic approach goes against real-world experience, and may actually promote illness. A patient's experience is fundamental, and must be taken into account in the therapeutic relationship. Yet modern science, and modern medicine, have ignored experience as valid areas of study, preferring instead to objectify the world and its inhabitants. This, in Broom's view, is a major hindrance to the real progress of mainstream healthcare. There are many books out there on holistic healthcare, of varying credibility. For those who are serious about the future of healthcare, I highly recommend this readable yet profound book.

I'm proud to be the first to review Brian Bloom's book for .com. I met Brian in New Zealand at a conference sponsored by the Mind-Body Trust. I was excited by his presentation and expected the book to be equally enticing. I was not disappointed. Within medicine, a number of us are puzzling over how disease develops and how healing occurs. This puzzling is outside of the conventional biomedical paradigm which renders all by genetics as random events with which we should not be concerned. Brian's book helped me to see how the language that we use about our illness arises from our bodies. Language is not just a mental phenomenon but is produced through our bodies which speak the language of metaphor. The language we use is no accident and provides clues for our understanding of the life events associated with illness. The concepts are hard to quickly describe, for we are used to separating mind, body, spirit, life into different categories. Brian teaches us to appreciate the absence of separation and to contemplate a unified mindbodyspirit that is embedded in a social world. I am very grateful to Brian for his insights and recommend this book most highly to anyone interested in narrative medicine or the mind-body-spirit relationship.

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