



The Word As Scalpel: A History of Medical Sociology

Samuel W. Bloom

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"A doctor can damage a patient as much with a misplaced word as with a slip of the scalpel." In this statement, from Lawrence J. Henderson, a famous physician whose name is part of the basic science of medicine, epitomizes the central theme of *The Word as Scalpel*. If words, the main substance of human relations, are so potent for harm, how equally powerful they can be to help if used with disciplined knowledge and understanding. Nowhere does this simple truth apply more certainly than in the behavior of a physician.

Medical Sociology studies the full social context of health and disease, the interpersonal relations, social institutions, and the influence of social factors on the problems of medicine. Throughout its history, medical sociology divides naturally into two parts: the pre-modern, represented by various studies of health and social problems in Europe and the United States until the second World War, and the modern post-war period. The modern period has seen rapid growth and the achievement of the full formal panoply of professionalism.

This engaging account documents the development of professional associations, official journals, and programs of financial support, both private and governmental. Written by a distinguished pioneer in medical sociology, *The Word as Scalpel* is a definitive study of a relatively new, but critically important field.

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