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# Disease is not 'war' – paradigm change in disease metaphorization in public health

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## INTRODUCTION

The way people think and talk about health and disease has deep metaphorical and unconscious basis. As Schwarz and Hauser wrote: "The metaphors we use to frame health and disease have the power to influence public health in beneficial or harmful ways. It is therefore important to investigate the inferences that metaphors promote before entering them into public discourse or making them a central theme in health communications." Cognitive linguistics researchers showed that 'war' is our basic metaphor for disease. Illnesses and microbes 'attack', patients 'defend' themselves, we can 'win or lose' with disease, drugs are 'weapon' and prophylaxis is 'the first line of defence' etc. This metaphorization is useful and beneficial in some cases but it is harmful especially in case of non-infectious diseases. Psychologists and clinical psychotherapists postulate the need of new disease metaphorization ways like 'travel', 'collaboration' or 'troublesome neighbourhood'. Public health professionals, educationists teaching medical jobs vocations, prophylaxis specialists have to be aware of this phenomenon and engage in the new conceptualization.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results show that classical metaphorization was useful for decades especially to cope with infectious diseases and it has been also beneficial in cases of diseases related to contemporary civilisation and during Covid-19 pandemics (everyone has been 'mobilized' to 'fight' with pandemic outbreak and 'virus' invasion). On the other hand, it is highly insufficient in cases of fatal and chronic diseases, psychiatric problems, genetic issues and other non-infectious cases. Furthermore, we can speak not only about insufficiency but also harmfulness of this kind of way of thinking e.g. in cases of oncological patients who should not define their disease in terms of 'winning' or 'losing'.

Metaphorization of our everyday language has an impact on our daily life. The conceptual metaphors that disease is war / enemy / punishment / flaw / sin / neighbourhood / voyage, etc. carry very specific and sometimes beneficial consequences. E.g. when disease become a „challenge”, in contrast to the war or sport, it gives the patient the possibility of choosing different paths of understanding his/her own situation. – even the disease itself can become an opportunity for personal growth and development

We should remember that even though theoretically it is possible to imagine other ways of presenting this topic, the top-down change of metaphorization method in the area of the given phenomenon is hardly possible. The language naturally responds to the changes in the surrounding world and probably in the case of dissemination of therapies based on the method of "putting to sleep" pathogens or epidemics of chronic/incurable/genetic diseases it will adjust on its own to the changed environment. It is good to be aware of such determinants in order to be able to properly respond to custom situations that can afflict us or our family as well as in order to be less influenced by the media in this area.

## OBJECTIVES

The main goal of the paper is to show classical metaphorization for health and disease and its limitations, but also its impact on people's behaviour, medical issues reaction, amount of pharmaceuticals taking and therapeutic process itself. Another goal is to show alternative approach to disease metaphor conceptualization especially from psychologists and psychotherapists community. The final one is to take into consideration the possible implementation of this new approach by public health professionals.

The methods used in this paper are from the range of cognitive linguistics, medical anthropology and psychology.

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