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Meaning, Medicine, and the “Placebo Effect”

Daniel E. Moerman presents an innovative and enlightening discussion of human reaction to the meaning of medical treatment. Many things happen in medicine that cannot be attributed to specific elements, such as drugs or surgical procedures. The same drug can work differently when presented in different colors; inert drugs (placebos, dummies) often have dramatic effects on people (the “placebo effect”); and effects can vary hugely among different European countries where the “same” medical condition is understood differently, or has different meanings, yielding different meaning responses. This lively book reviews and analyzes these matters in lucid, straightforward prose, guiding the reader through a very complex body of literature, leaving nothing unexplained but avoiding any oversimplification.

DANIEL E. MOERMAN is William E. Stirton Professor of Anthropology at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. He is a fellow of the American Anthropological Association and Secretary of the International Society for Ethnopharmacology. His recent book *Native American Ethnobotany* (1998) received the “Annual Literature Award” of the Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries for 2000.

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For Claudine,
with admiration, affection, and love

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