

Health, Wellness and Prevention

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This was written in 1999, but is still very applicable for today.

Bill goes to his physician with complaints of chest pains occurring over the past month. His doctor performs the standard tests and declares that Bill is healthy as a horse. "But why do I have these pains?" Over the next 9 months Bill goes to 2 family practice physicians, 2 gastroenterologists, 3 cardiologists, and a battery of doctors at one of this country's most respected medical schools. To find out what? Nothing! He continues to have much chest pain and the doctors cannot find anything wrong with him. If you didn't know Bill you would probably agree with the doctors that it is *all in his head*. But Bill is your best friend, or perhaps your father or husband. You trust him. You know him. And you know he has a *real* problem.

Does this sound improbable? Not really. This happens frequently in our clinics and hospitals. An article in the American Journal of Medicine in 1986 indicated that a full 74% of symptoms had no known cause! Why is this? Modern medicine is supposed to know everything, isn't it? Or do we endow Medicine with unnatural *super human* abilities which are unrealistic?

In 1991, the British Medical Journal published that only about 15% of medical interventions are supported by scientific evidence. It went on to say that this might be so because only 1% of the articles in medical journals are scientifically sound.

Sometimes we forget that Medicine is a healing ART. And as with all arts, medicine does not have all the answers. There is no single drug that cures *anything*! Our bodies do the healing. Drugs may help us to fight off the bad guys. And yet, are drugs the answer?

Inherent within any solution are innate problems. Drugs - both prescription and over-the-counter medications - have side effects (this is double-speak for direct effects). Annually, drug-related problems cost as much as \$182 billion and kill as many as 198,815 people. Drugs put 8.8 million people into hospitals, accounting for up to 28% of all hospital admissions. [American Medical News, 1/15/96] Adverse Drug Reactions (ADRs) are the fourth leading cause of death in this country behind heart disease, cancer, and stroke. [JAMA, 4/15/98]

We perform procedures to alleviate consequences of procedures. Take drugs to help with side effects of other drugs. And perhaps worse of all we are seldom honest with our patients -- letting them know that "we don't know!" There is a strong urge to prescribe antibiotics for ear infections that will heal on their own. It is almost as if I would lose self respect if someone knew that I did not know everything. Aren't medical doctors *supposed* to know everything. Perhaps it is this over zealous need to *do something* that leads to further mistakes of judgement. The May/June 1994 issue of Public Citizen wrote that Medical Malpractice is the third most preventable cause of death in the U.S. (accounting for 80,000 deaths and 150,000 - 300,000 injuries from negligence annually.)

In the landmark 1990 study at Harvard University which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine the researchers indicated that "... there were 38 million more visits made to alternative healthcare providers each year than to all the family practitioners, general practitioners, general internists, and pediatricians combined. ... Americans spend more money out-of-pocket on alternative health services than on conventional medicine ..." The latest study pushes the number of people making use of

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alternative practices from 30% in 1990 to 45% in 1997. The April 1998 issue of JAMA did a study of why people go to alternative medicine practitioners. The main reasons were because they found the therapies to be *more effective* and that it was *more compatible with their personal philosophy of life and healing*. Additionally, the study found that the better educated and more well-read an individual, the greater the likelihood they would make use of alternative medicine.

We must keep in perspective what Medicine can and cannot do. Andrew Weil, MD writes about this in his book Spontaneous Healing.

Conventional Medicine can:

- ⌞ Manage serious trauma
- ⌞ Diagnose and treat many medical emergencies
- ⌞ Treat acute bacterial infections with antibiotics
- ⌞ Replace damaged hips, knees, and other body parts
- ⌞ Get good results with cosmetic and reconstructive surgery

Conventional Medicine cannot:

- ⌞ Treat viral infections
- ⌞ Cure most chronic degenerative diseases
- ⌞ Effectively manage most kinds of mental illness
- ⌞ Cure most forms of allergy or autoimmune disease
- ⌞ Cure most forms of cancer

We must remember that conventional medicine is not necessarily **bad** - It is just important to make sure it is being used for conditions where it is appropriate and effective and where there are no less invasive protocols.

Well, what is health that we may look to treat dis-ease? In his book The Science of Homeopathy, George Vitoulkas states "... we summarize the definition of health of the whole being as follows: health is freedom from pain in the physical body, having attained a state of well-being; freedom from passion on the emotional level, having as a result a dynamic state of serenity and calm; and freedom from selfishness in the mental sphere having as a result total unification with Truth." He goes on to share that "The parameter which enables such measurement of health is *creativity*." So health is somewhat more complicated that just the absence of symptoms! Are many of us truly healthy?

Health is defined less as a measure to be compared from one person to another than as an overall quality of life defined by our own ability to adapt to life's stresses and maintain a basic enjoyment for life. It is a journey that we each take, often with multiple lay-overs along the way.

Stressors that Create Our Health

Our state of health is directly proportional to our ability to adapt and respond to stress and inversely proportional to the amount or size of the stress. In other words, if we can increase our immune factors such that we can handle stress, we can remain healthy; and if we can lessen the amount of stress that we must deal with, we can remain healthy.

What is stress? Stress is *anything* that requires adaptation by our physical body. Stress can be mental and

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emotional as well as physical. An argument with your spouse, a repetitive action at work (like continual typing or keyboarding), a perception of too much mental work and deadlines, a sprained ankle, the flu. All of these are stresses that will affect the physical body. Some of these items can be eliminated or reduced; others can not. In order to manage our health, we want to decrease the **bad** stresses that impact our lives. Not all stresses are *bad*. Some stresses actually help to improve our immune system and encourage long term health (even if it creates short term illness!) Some of these **eu-stresses** are *good feelings* from things that we enjoy doing, eating a good meal, and even the colds that we get. Additionally, we want to encourage actions that will allow us to handle more stresses - eating properly, relaxation, exercise, hobbies, etc.

The Life Cycle of Disease

Disease is not something that occurs all of a sudden. It is a series of events that cascade to a point that we arbitrarily call disease. This point is characterized by the ability of science to diagnose its existence. If no diagnosis can be made, an illness or disease does not exist. As diagnostic tests have become more sensitive over the years, diseases have been able to be diagnosed earlier. The peculiar thing is that a condition that can be diagnosed today with high-tech testing procedures was considered to be ***just in your head*** only a few short years ago when no definitive diagnostic procedures were available. Likewise today, how many conditions go undetected for lack of more sophisticated testing methods? Before we can diagnose this *disease* state, there must be sufficient histological and pathological changes to fully differentiate the disease from other pathological states. At that point in the continuum, often only heroic measures are available to restore health. Many times, health cannot be restored and only palliative measures can be utilized.

But if we look at what is going on within the body prior to this point of *disease*, we would find that a host of changes occur, signaling both the presence of stress on the body and the body's attempt to adapt to the stress and restore balance to the body. These changes include biochemical changes within the cell and tissue affecting energy production, transport and regulation of carrier molecules across the cell membrane, manufacture of specialized proteins, enzymes, neurotransmitters, and fatty acids to name but a few. Eventually these changes would affect organ system function. This sets the stage for what later will be called disease. By this time, we have experienced mild energy loss or fatigue, perhaps some fleeting symptoms which fit no pattern and do not seem to make sense. Traditional interpretation of laboratory test procedures do not reveal any hint of problems. And so we wait until something gets worse so that we finally can do something.

This is perhaps analogous to looking for a real fire when all you can find is smoke throughout the house. The smoke is coming from a fire. The fire may be so small as to go unnoticed – just a slow smouldering combustion of electric insulation. But rest assured, you would probably not give up looking for the fire as long as there was smoke in *your* house!

What can be done about making changes in our lives to alter the course of *impending disease*?

Making Changes in Our Lives

The first thing we can do is to learn as much about health and healing as we can. Be a **good** consumer. Be as prudent and involved with your health care as you would when you purchase a car! Make the **commitment** to **change** how you eat, exercise, and deal with stresses in your lives. Only *you* can be

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responsible for *your* health.

In a recent study, it was determined that 75% of our quality of life between the ages of 70 and 95 is determined by the choices we make from age 40 to 60. This tends to indicate that you are never too old to change! Also that age- old maxim of "...if it ain't broke, don't fix it" may need to be revisited. If there are subtle changes occurring within our bodies that cannot be deciphered by traditional medicine, then perhaps we should look elsewhere for additional information on the status of our own health!

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine focuses primarily upon the symptoms that an individual is expressing. Treatment is generally aimed at suppressing these symptoms instead of discovering and eliminating the cause. Disease state intervention is usually late because not only is the focus *not* on the whole person, but also because discovery tools available today are not being utilized.

Functional Medicine

Functional medicine is the field of health care focused upon assessment and early intervention that facilitates improvement of the body's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. By looking for patterns of early dysfunction, treatment can begin early.

In the past decade, medicine has witnessed a revolution in molecular biology. The body, that has for so long been viewed as static is now beginning to be seen as dynamic. The relationships of systems with other systems within our body is ever changing based on input from all other areas. This web-like pattern of relationships means that when we pull on one thread, many threads are plucked. This interconnectedness is constantly redefining relationships based on our moment-to-moment nutritional needs, our ever changing environment, circadian rhythms found within and without our body, and even on our own perceptions of our environment.

As long as all parts of our self respond to our inner and outer environment in such a way that our quality of life is maintained, then we have health. But if we are unable to respond or adapt to these influences, then *dis-ease* develops.

A functional medicine practitioner views health as a positive vitality. Health is more than just the absence of disease; it is the presence of wellness, and it can be measured as a functional series of physical, physiological, cognitive, and emotional criteria or characteristics.

Not all rheumatoid arthritics are the same. Not all diabetics are the same. Disease has been traditionally defined by tissue type, invasiveness, location, and appearance - descriptions and characterizations. As a consequence, it fits more into definitive types of structure rather than functional types of structure, the latter looking at differences from patient to patient based on their physiological, psychological, emotional, and physical performance and how they relate to the symptoms we later codify as disease.

Illness can be seen as information. Symptoms of varying severity, intensity, and duration are bits of information that tell us about a person's state of harmony with his or her life.

The Discovery Process

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Traditional medicine makes use of all traditional diagnostic tools to aid in the definition of a clinical diagnosis - that for which a well defined, well delineated clinical disease state exists.

Functional medicine, on the other hand, makes use of the same traditional diagnostic tools as well as leading edge technology and tests developed scientifically and well researched with the question of biochemical balance in mind. This information is utilized to determine not only clinical pathology and disease, but also patterns of *subclinical dysfunction*. These dysfunctions are the beginnings of pathological changes and occur months and years *before* disease can be identified.

The Treatment Process

Traditional medicine approaches include surgery, medications, physical rehabilitation, and counseling methods. The typical relationship developed between the patient and physician is physician-centered and directed.

Functional medicine takes advantage of all forms of traditional medical approaches *when necessary*. It also includes chiropractic, acupuncture, phytopharmaceuticals and nutritional supplements, as well as encouraging lifestyle changes (diet, exercise, ergonomics, etc.). Its approach is more holistic and less compartmentalized. The doctor-patient relationships is patient-centered, supportive, and empowering. We are data warehouses supplying large amounts of information to aid in developing a course to travel, but the patient is the pilot.

Allow me to leave you with a code of responsibility that we each should strive to fulfill.

The Doctor's Responsibility

- ⌞ Understand the patient's health goals.
- ⌞ Take a thorough history and appropriate physical examination.
- ⌞ Make use of appropriate diagnostic tools – those that would make a change in the treatment plan.
- ⌞ Be fiscally conservative, but not to the compromise of the patient's health.
- ⌞ Deal with the current health crises.
- ⌞ Develop a comprehensive treatment plan to include any lifestyle changes necessary to aid the patient in moving into greater health.
- ⌞ Communicate the plan to the patient.
- ⌞ Follow up at regular intervals to be sure the plan is working and to see, via further diagnostic testing, if it needs to be modified.

The Patient's Responsibility

- ⌞ Be honest with the doctor about your health goals.
- ⌞ Be concise, yet thorough, in giving needed information to the doctor.
- ⌞ Understand your health plan – ask questions until you do.
- ⌞ Be responsible – plan the dive and dive the plan.
- ⌞ Follow up.

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Remember, we are all walking on the path of health – in what direction are *you* moving?