

# Integrative Medicine

What's *really* going on?

-by Dr. Bruce Hoffman

**A**lternative medicine is being integrated into mainstream medicine by a patient driven, educated consumerism, whether the medical profession likes it or not.

I have heard the same lament too many times to ignore it any longer. Every day, while interviewing new patients, I hear the same words over and over again. Patients tell me, often with sadness, sometimes anger and most often with regret, that they have come to the end of their relationships with their family practitioners. The reasons most often given are “he just doesn’t listen to my needs anymore” or “she chastises me every time I wish to use non -drug therapies” or “he doesn’t see me as a whole person, but as a set of symptoms” or “she’s a very good G.P. but she doesn’t know anything about the supplements I’m taking and laughs at me and my expensive vitamin enriched urine.”

This morning, a new patient, (who I shall call Helen), presented with the familiar opening lines. She told me that her doctor of 23 years, whom she had once worked for, and who had delivered her three children, replied to her questioning about alternative therapies, “Oh, come on Helen, get a grip.” She told me that the close relationship she had with him ended right then and there. This to me is tragic.

I know how hard my colleagues work. How compassionate and dedicated so many of them are. How accomplished they are at the fine art and science of family medicine. So why this huge resistance to embracing the healing modalities that so many of their patients are actively seeking and gaining benefits from?

Last November, the American Medical Association (AMA) dedicated an entire issue of their journal JAMA to alternative medicine. Their editorial literally gushed with the promise of alternative medical procedures. The question was raised as to why this bastion of conventional medicine, which has vociferously opposed alternative medicine in the past, suddenly jumped on the bandwagon. According to Dr Julian Whitaker, a well known U.S. practitioner and spokesperson for alternative medicine, the answer is simple. “It’s because the public is deserting conventional medicine and flocking to alternative health care providers by the millions.”

Back in 1991, David Eisenberg M.D., published a groundbreaking study on the extent to which the public had adopted alternative medicine. His follow-up study was the lead article in JAMA, entitled “Trends in Alternative Medicine Use in the United States, 1990-1997. Dr. Eisenberg reported that 46.3% of Americans visited an alternative practitioner in 1997. This is a substantial increase from the 36.3% he reported in 1991, when the American public made 427 million visits to

alternative care practitioners .By 1997, the number had jumped to 629 million, exceeding the total visits to all conventional physicians.

One finding of the study – which must surely be alarming to the medical establishment, - was that 60% of people who consulted alternative practitioners didn't discuss it with their conventional physicians. As it has become apparent to me, it's not because they don't want their professional advice. They just know in advance what their doctor will say and they are sparing themselves the embarrassment of an unpleasant interview.

Apart from patients wanting their doctors to know about what the latest research is saying about Saw Palmetto and Glucosamine sulfate [and don't let any doctor get away with "there aren't enough studies to recommend their use.") There are many good quality studies done on a multitude of non drug therapies that just aren't published in the drug sponsored journals that doctors commonly read. They are also expressing a profound need for their family practitioners to hear their concerns about the mind-body connection, the role of relationships in their lives, the power of love, prayer and humor and the meaning of soul and ones connection to families and the universe. These issues no longer belong in the confession boxes at church, or the psychologist's office, but are being brought into the consulting rooms of the family physicians.

Patients are no longer tolerant of alternative medicine being regarded as "light" medicine. They are taking their holistic world views very seriously and are expecting their health care providers to assist them in identifying all sources of toxic disturbance that may be impinging on the mind-body and spiritual system. .

As people explore and open themselves and their families up to this new information, they are realizing that they are more than just a physical body with a set of symptoms. But that they have an electromagnetic body that is influenced by ones environment, a more subtle body comprised of the mind, the intellect and the ego, and a soul- that part of themselves that according to our western Judaic tradition, is unborn and never dies, is immortal and eternal and beyond space and time. They are aware that physical disease is often the end expression of long ignored minor symptoms and long for some advice on how to address these complaints before they manifest as major diseases.

I suspect that some of my colleagues' resistance to this new medicine may be due to a genuine distrust in what they see as entrepreneurial zeal on the part of the alternative practitioners exploiting the gullibility of a vulnerable and ill informed public. They may also genuinely believe that holistic treatments are without scientific merit.

My suspicion is there is more at play here. Unwittingly, I believe that doctors and patients unconsciously collude in a archetypal relationship whereby the doctor sees himself as all healthy and the patient as all sick and the patient often learns the sick role as a way of surviving this one sided connection. Not only do doctors learn to see their patients as walking syndromes, many patients long to be seen as diseases. This perspective often depersonalizes as well as decontextualizes the patient while treating the disease. This model blinds both the doctor and the patient to the reality of the inner physician, that part of ourselves that constantly reminds us of our wholeness and which activates the

mysterious healing powers within ourselves, the so called healing factor. This approach can also be said to be lacking in helping people achieve and maintain maximum health. Health being defined as the optimal integration of our consciousness, mind, body and environment, a vibrant state of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. It excludes the fact that we live in a largely complex, mysterious participatory universe where the physical body is but one expression of a much larger cosmological wholeness. No longer tolerant of N D medicine (name of symptom equals name of drug) it is this paradigm to which the “new” generation of patients is subscribing.

While doctors believe themselves as all healthy, they are not forced to look at themselves as mortal, vulnerable and wounded individuals, in need of their own healing. And that is why I believe my colleagues are afraid on this new medicine. They are scared to death of their own wounding and have not been adequately prepared or trained to diagnose, let alone treat, the full extent of their own private suffering. Hence they fail to recognize the full extent of their patients cries for help. They have not chartered this territory within themselves, how on earth are they going to traverse this unknown territory with their patients.

I believe it is becoming evident that doctors and healers of the future must be trained to identify and treat all sources of toxic disturbances and imbalances of the body, mind and spiritual continuum. As well as, have sufficient life experience to help facilitate this passage of healing and restoration of the memory of balance or wholeness.

Alternative medicine is being integrated into mainstream medicine, by a patient driven educated consumerism, whether the medical profession likes it or not. Viable alternative solutions for virtually all medical conditions will continue to grow in popularity into the next century. As a result, the entire face of medicine will change dramatically. My colleagues had better be prepared, or face at the least, the disappointment of ever increasing patient dissatisfaction. Or worse yet - extinction.

This column will endeavor to keep you informed of the most successful integrative approaches to a number of medical conditions. Stay tuned.

Next month: Male menopause- the facts and myths about Males moaning.