

Integrative Medicine: Rethinking Health Care Delivery

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IT STARTS WITH A PERSONAL STORY...

Fifteen years ago I was a consulting psychologist with a newly minted doctorate, happy, and engaged in checkbook philanthropy on the side. But in the deep of winter, a diagnosis of breast cancer upended my world.

While I received state-of-the-art care – mastectomy, chemotherapy, and hormonal therapy at a fine cancer center – anyone who has received the dreaded cancer diagnosis will tell you that it affects more than just your body. It affects your mind and spirit as well. I was flooded with existential questions about the meaning of my life. I wanted to know what I could do to prevent a recurrence, how I might heal fully, and what approaches would help mitigate the side effects of the care itself. I wanted to know how to create a new normal.

On a quest to learn what was available beyond surgery and drugs, I discovered acupuncture was helpful for side effects of treatment, and massage, meditation, and yoga helped with the stress of adjusting to my new identity as a cancer patient. I pursued nutrition through a medical lens and even went on an 11-day *Vision Quest* in the desert Southwest to dig deeply into the purpose of my life, which ultimately led to a new vision not just for my career, but my life.

I realized I wanted to persuade medicine to embrace the notion of whole-person healing that I had found so transformative. At the time, because the focus was on adding approaches that came from outside what was taught in U.S. medical schools, the field was known as complementary and alternative medicine, or CAM. But it was never really alternative since patients like me wanted to draw on the best options from all healing traditions.

FROM SOLO EFFORTS TO COLLABORATION

My early efforts centered on improving patient care at the cancer center where I was treated. We also funded clinical research

in the hospital's cardiovascular center, which was exploring a more holistic approach to recovery from heart surgery.

Encouraged by these early successes and aware that I was part of a growing national underground, I realized that it was important to bring together the physician leaders in this movement with the philanthropists who were committed to it. With my husband's support and the facilitation of our philanthropic advisors, we hosted two meetings in 2001 that led to the creation of The Bravewell Collaborative.

Bravewell is an example of how philanthropy can create social change in America, and how a handful of committed people can make a disproportionate difference in moving the dial. Bravewell is a community of philanthropists dedicated to

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furthering a vision of integrative medicine. By cofunding strategic initiatives beyond the reach of any single funder, over 10 years we have educated the public about the care they should demand and the science behind it, facilitated the spread and sustainability of leading clinical centers, and funded training of physicians in integrative medicine. We have recognized and rewarded the top leaders in the field and partnered with the Institute of Medicine in hosting the *Summit on Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public*. More information is available at www.bravewell.org.

THE NATION'S HEALTH NEEDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The bigger picture is the need for medicine and health care to move from focusing on disease to focusing on health and wellness. Western medicine flowered in the early years of the 20th century when it became a science-based profession. During World War II, drugs that could cure infectious diseases were developed, leading to an expectation that medicine's "magic

bullets” could cure anything. Most of us unwittingly still subscribe to that belief. Today, however, most of the suffering and costs of health care are associated with lifestyle-related chronic illness. As a nation, in addition to improving care, we need to foster health and wellness. Integrative medicine is ideally suited to meet this century’s health care needs.

THE INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE APPROACH

By emphasizing partnerships between patients and caregivers, integrative medicine empowers individuals to be the primary source of their own wellness. By addressing the root cause of their health problems and the connection between body, mind, and spirit, there is greater potential to activate the body’s own healing mechanisms.

There are healing modalities associated with how integrative medicine has evolved, from practitioner-based ones like acupuncture, to self-care approaches that reduce stress and improve nutritional status. Integrative medicine, however, is not the same thing as those modalities. What characterizes the practice of integrative medicine is an open-mindedness about how to approach the ultimate goal of health and healing, with the patient as the principal agent.

CHALLENGES OF TRANSFORMING MEDICINE

The field of medicine changes partly in response to the changing demands of patients and by the personal experiences of practitioners. Research is important, but it takes a long time for research to change behaviors; for example, following Ignaz Semmelweis’ discovery of the importance of handwashing in preventing maternal mortality, it took 70 years to change the behavior of surgeons delivering babies.

Through the efforts of The Bravewell Collaborative and others to educate the public, the demand for integrative services and integrative health care professionals has grown dramatically in recent years. But there are other forces at work: physicians, hospitals, and clinics are still largely compensated in a fee-for-service model; keeping patients well does not maintain a healthy balance sheet. There is also a “bias to treat” in medicine, where doing more is often the default choice even when common sense would suggest doing less or something different.

Coming soon in the form of Accountable Care Organizations and other outcomes-based payment models, incentives will finally be conducive to integrative medicine. For example, pain management is an enormous and costly problem, and there is growing awareness that how we currently care for people in pain is ineffective. Integrative medicine, with its holistic, multimodal, interdisciplinary, and patient-centered approach, achieves better outcomes than the current, pharmaceutical-centric model of care.

WHAT INTEGRATIVE CARE LOOKS LIKE

The George Institute for Health and Healing at Abbott Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis has both an outpatient center offering a wide range of integrative healing services and a robust inpatient program. The institute has conducted over 78,000 patient visits since 2005, including integrative care for heart transplant patients and those having joint replacement surgery.

A patient at Abbott Northwestern Hospital who has pain, anxiety, or nausea can, after a consult with a clinical nurse specialist, choose from a wide range of integrative healing options. The patient is then treated until the problem resolves.

Patient satisfaction is measurably higher than with usual care, and the hospital is saving roughly \$2,000 per patient per

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admission, including the overhead for the institute. The integrative programs are so successful that the hospital system, Allina Clinics & Hospitals, has begun to spread these services throughout all its 11 hospitals and is offering some of the programs as employee benefits.

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE’S POSITIVE IMPACT

Practicing integrative medicine goes beyond our current approach of treating symptoms. It looks for deeper sources of chronic illness and addresses the full range of physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and environmental influences that affect a person’s health (The Bravewell Collaborative 2010). I believe that integrative medicine offers the best opportunity we have to reverse the negative trend in the nation’s overall health. It provides models for helping people stay well and engages them in regaining control of their healing process when they are sick. Clinical research is demonstrating that all of these efforts will reduce the cost of care for patients, saving precious dollars that can then be used to increase access to care for all Americans.

SOURCES

The Bravewell Collaborative, *Integrative Medicine: Improving Health Care for Patients and Health Care Delivery for Providers and Payors* (Minneapolis, MN: 2010).

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