

Integrative Medicine Offers Opportunity for Shared Learning and Collaboration

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There is growing interest in the field known as integrative medicine. A 2007 national survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 38.3 percent of all adults, up from 36 percent in 2002, accessed some form of complementary and alternative medicine through visits to acupuncturists, chiropractors, massage therapists, among others (Barnes et al. 2008). And while spending on these visits and related products, such as glucosamine, fish oil, and echinacea, represents only 2 percent of total medical spending in the United States, it still adds up to a staggering \$34 billion. In addition, a 2007 survey conducted by the

Health Forum, a subsidiary of the American Hospital Association, found that 37 percent of U.S. hospitals reported that they offered some sort of “complementary and alternative” health care, up from 26.5 percent just two years earlier (American Hospital Association 2008).

Proponents of integrative medicine are encouraged by these trends, especially when considered in the context of the current national discussion about health care reform. With its focus on lowering costs, providing increased access to high-quality care, and improving the health of all Americans, the debate has shed intense light on how we approach health and care in our country. There are many who argue that the current system is a “sick care” system, not one that promotes wellness. By not taking an “upstream” approach to health and preventing disease from the outset, our health and economy have suffered severe consequences. In addition, our historic fee-for-service model often encourages aggressive and invasive health care services rather than less invasive and often lower cost approaches that evidence suggests are often as or more effective. Integrative medicine, with its interrelated approach to treating the mind, body, and spirit, takes into account both traditional and non-Western approaches to wellness and care and offers potential solutions to a system that has been critically burdened.

These issues, along with our own experience as funders of integrative medicine initiatives, led the Fannie E. Rippel Foundation and the Samueli Foundation to partner with Grantmakers In Health (GIH) to convene an exploratory session recently at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital's Myrna Brind Center of Integrative Medicine. In September 2009, GIH members came together in Philadelphia for the strategy session *Exploring the Value of Integrative Medicine... A Funder's Perspective* where we explored the value of and challenges to raising the level of discourse concerning the various facets of integrative medicine.

The convening's presentations made it abundantly clear that integrative approaches, grounded in evidence-based practice, are increasingly accepted and being mainstreamed.

DEFINITIONS:

Integrative medicine includes the full array of preventive, diagnostic, and treatment methods that can preserve and restore health and well-being, including conventional, complementary, and alternative modalities.

Conventional medicine, often called allopathic or Western medicine, refers to a system in which medical doctors and other health care professionals treat symptoms and diseases using drugs, radiation, or surgery.

Complementary and alternative medicine refers to a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not generally considered part of conventional medicine and include acupuncture, massage, yoga, meditation, biofeedback, natural supplements, to name just a few. Complementary medicine is used to enhance conventional medicine techniques, and alternative medicine is used in place of conventional medicine.

GIH members learned about the work and progress of the Myrna Brind Center whose programs unite conventional medicine with lifestyle approaches and complementary therapies, including acupuncture, massage, psychology, art, stress management, diet and nutrition, meditation, and biofeedback, to treat and/or prevent cancer, cardiovascular disease, menopause and osteoporosis, and pain. With a broad range of therapies from which to choose, a more personalized and effective approach to wellness and care can be delivered. By practicing evidence-based integrative care, the center is experiencing new levels of acceptance from a conventional medicine-based community, including increased patient referrals from Jefferson University Hospital's physicians, especially in the areas of cancer and pain-related treatments.

The Samuelli Institute, a research-based nonprofit organization established by the Samuelli Foundation, engages in pioneering research in the field of integrative medicine to determine the efficacy of various modalities. In particular, their research in the practice of military medicine has led to relief for the alarming one in eight members of the military or veterans having fought in Iraq who report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. VET-HEAL focuses on integrative healing approaches to physical and psychological trauma, including yoga, acupuncture, guided imagery, meditation, and others. These integrative interventions have minimal or no side effects and can be initiated early, as soon as symptoms appear. Once learned, many of these techniques may be self-administered, empowering soldiers to help themselves, while still providing them with access to expert care. This pioneering work is now embedded in key military and Veterans Administration (VA) sites around the country, including Walter Reed Army Medical Center; the Boston VA Research Institute; the Durham VA Medical Center/Duke University; the Philadelphia VA Medical Center; the Atlanta VA Medical Center/Emory University; and the Los Angeles VA Medical Center/University of California, Los Angeles.

The work of the Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Maryland offers another example of research that is building the evidence-base to support the potential efficacy of integrative medicine. This center is one of over 40 such academic centers of integrative medicine that conducts both basic and clinical research. For example, the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the university, in conjunction with the center, conducted a controlled, randomized research project that set out to learn about the ameliorative impact of green tea on rheumatoid arthritis. Using a rat-based model of the disease, Lewis rats were randomized to receive either green tea in their drinking water or water only for one to three weeks before being injected with heat-killed *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* to induce arthritis. It was determined that rats consuming green tea showed significantly less severe arthritis than their water-only consuming counterparts, leading researchers to conclude that further exploration of the effects of green tea on management of rheumatoid arthritis is warranted.

Challenges to the full-scale adoption of integrated medicine's treatment modalities into the historical silos of conventional, as well as complementary and alternative, care still remain. Confusion about the definition of terms persists, as does concern about the credibility of the field's practices among the more traditional communities. Conventional medical practitioners often cite the insufficient body of evidence-based research that could accurately measure the efficacy of integrative approaches. Alternative practitioners and patients bemoan the lack of consistent quality and the lack of broad-based insurance reimbursement for services. Others point to a fractured field in which a "guild mentality" separates practitioners from one another and weakens their ability to present a united front to those inclined to support the field.

Julius A. Rippel, the first president of the Fannie E. Rippel Foundation (1953-1983), was an early advocate of system change, advocating alternative approaches to care and new ways of thinking about improving health and care. In his view, "changes in modern life" require foundations to be "pioneers...[who]...have the courage to take initiative." Similarly, Dr. Henry Samuelli, and his wife, Susan Samuelli, founders of the Samuelli Foundation, have long recognized the role of philanthropy in advocating evidence-based research and new approaches if genuine health care systems change is to take effect.

It is in this spirit that participants in the GIH strategy session intend to go forward. Plans are already underway to create an affinity working group within GIH to facilitate ongoing conversations and convenings to identify opportunities for using the power of philanthropy to advance the field. In addition, a gathering for foundations interested in learning more about integrative medicine is slated for the upcoming GIH annual meeting in March. You can expect to hear more about the details as they become available.

SOURCES

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VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Faith Mitchell at 202.452.8331 or fmitchell@gih.org.