

Reflections on Complementary and Integrative Medicine

The future of medicine is clearly heading toward an integrative approach; the benefits for cancer survivorship, surgical outcomes, addressing flu epidemics and of course, the difficult lifestyle diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular problems are especially obvious. The longer I engage in clinical Ayurvedic practice, the more I see the value in an integrative approach. Many people, including myself, would prefer to avoid Allopathic medicine, if possible, but within reason. In general, I simply am careful with my diet and lifestyle. I don't even take many supplements - I prefer simply to eat good, appropriate food. If I feel a flu starting up, I just take a couple of Vibrant Lotus Products' Flu Detox (TM) capsules, and usually that's all that is needed. I wash my hands when I get home after being out, especially in flu season. The handwashing is clear application of the core Ayurvedic precept: "remove the cause". This approach works well in our household.

However, from time to time, I see significant benefit in the Allopathic way. Clinically, the advanced Ayurvedic practitioner sees immense value in reading blood work results from clients. Many people have had surgical repair after sports injuries, and go on with their lives — without the modern option, many would be crippled for rest of their lives. Antibiotics of course, are saving lives and reducing medical complications all over the world. The downside of having such miracle drugs available is that many doctors over-prescribe antibiotics, and we face a crisis of antibiotic resistant 'super bugs' now partly also because of the corporate use of antibiotic drugs in the production of meat animals.

The counterpoint to over reliance on modern allopathic techniques is an integrative way that applies surgery or the administration of pharmaceutical drugs with care. They can be used sparingly and as a means of last resort, which is the Ayurvedic approach. This might mean less money for the medical industry but can mean better outcome for people. In the oncology ward of the hospital recently, I have seen someone I care very much about benefit immensely from Ayurvedic knowledge, not just in the hospital, but throughout the treatment and recovery period. Ayurveda was able to offer nourishing treatments that were more gentle, soothing, and effective than other medicine on offer. Ayurveda can bring insight into assisting with rapid recovery from chemotherapy, and to protect the organs and tissues during chemo and radiation treatments. Most traditional MD's know remarkably little about alternative medicine, and while some may be open minded, others are stridently resistant to the 'new' ideas. Ayurveda has so much to offer as a complementary approach, integrated with Western Allopathic medicine— if only it were allowed, respected, and properly valued. The doshic model has so much to offer in the domain of customizing care to the patient – just a little bit of adjustment would make such a difference! I think modern American hospital food might really interfere with healing, never mind the drug resistant pathogens lurking in every hospital – in our country there is no screening for MRSA (drug resistant staph), as there is in Europe.

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Food is an important healing factor, as we who know even a little Ayurveda know very well. Bring nutritious, doshically appropriate food to any friend or family member who ends up in the hospital. This is important medicine. Alternative medicine, including proper diet, can keep us out of the hospital in the first place, and away from MRSA, avoiding mistakes that can result in drug overdoses, and of course the impact on a family that serious medical expenses can have. We are living in the time we are in; I predict that in the future the separation of alternative medicine from the AMA style medicine will be seen as a 'dark ages of medicine'. Future medicine will be complementary medicine. The article from Boulder Ayurveda's last newsletter about the 'discovery' of silver as an anti-infection agent by Western Medicine hearkens change. But we can all participate in a more enlightened approach to health, healing and medicine. Those who know some Ayurveda can help; we all can make a difference by augmenting or finding a way to adjust the 'one size fits all' model; and helping ourselves, our family and our friends find a more personal approach to medicine. Everyone deserves a treatment plan that considers prakruti, vikruti, and a realistic assessment of what diet and lifestyle changes are realistic. The integrative approach can radically change prospects for lifelong wellness.

Seasonal Note:

We are about to transition away from Summer season into Fall. According to Ayurveda this coming time is called a 'sandhi' or junction; it represents a special health maintenance opportunity. Those with Pitta constitutions, Pitta dispositions, or Pitta imbalances should prepare to remove excess Pitta which has accumulated during our exquisite but hot summer season. A particularly useful way to quickly do this: donate blood, which is one of the 'Pancha Karma' practices, called rakta moksha. If you can't give blood, if for instance, you have recently travelled to India, you can ask a nurse or phlebotomist to remove approximately 200cc's. Note the standard pint donation is 500cc's. Alternatively, you can work on removing the excess pitta other ways, like going on a pitta reducing cleansing diet which might include reducing sour and hot spicy foods, and enjoying spices like cumin, coriander and turmeric. Also consider taking virechan herbs, such as amalaki tea to pull the accumulated pitta out of the small intestine. Try ½ teaspoon as tea, steeped 3 minutes and allowed to cool, twice a day, before breakfast and before bedtime. Brush your teeth afterwards to avoid staining of the teeth. Consider scheduling time with Varadaan to structure the best cleansing plan for your particular constitution and condition.

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