



Healthcare Reform Milwaukee-Style: The InWellness Initiative

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I am a clinical psychologist, trained in and practicing community health since 1970. I and a group of health and wellness providers have been deeply concerned over the “healthcare crisis” in our country and how it has impacted us in SE Wisconsin. Out of our meetings since the spring of 2008 has come an initiative we are calling InWellness. Specifically we are espousing a shift in values in the areas of personal responsibility for one’s health, community based approach to healthy lifestyle and the support for a diversity of independent providers.

We believe the core of the so-called “healthcare crisis” is not being addressed. It is not spiraling costs or the lack of universal care coverage. These are symptoms, not the cause. The more fundamental roots of our current dysfunctional state are:

1. An erosion of individuals’ awareness of and responsibility for their own health and wellbeing. This responsibility is being put increasingly in hands of technical and business experts, not people themselves.
2. The loss of providers’ control of their professional practices. Medical systems, insurance, managed care; government regulations are some of the outside influences with competing interests that compromise the integrity of the client/provider relationship.

None of these parties are the “bad guys,” but they have gotten off track by a competitive, fear-based approach to a common goal of wellbeing.

Personal responsibility for one’s health

Personal responsibility for healthy life choices starts with education. This involves making informed decisions for oneself versus fear-driven choices out of ignorance and outside persuasion from those with vested interests.

When our healthcare philosophy is directed to “avoid harm” rather than “promote wellbeing” a climate of fear insidiously grows. Our approach to health becomes fear-based and we tend to see our bodies as under siege by predatory substances from viruses to incompetent caregivers. We then give away our responsibility and power to safeguard ourselves to outside “experts” who purport to know what is best for us. These experts, also operating from fear, need to insure they will not be sued for misdiagnosis or treatment by ordering every possible test and procedure to cover their assets. Insurance companies trying to bring optimal service to their constituents, fearful of inappropriate usage, invest heavily in managing care and fraud investigation. The cost of managing our fears this way is ever increasing. Just saying we should trust everyone does

not help. But we can create systems that bring greater knowledge and responsibility back to the hands of the individual who can learn the joy and self-reward of a healthy lifestyle.

Support for a diversity of independent health and wellness providers

The InWellness initiative supports diversity of opinion, healthy dialogue amongst good spirited advocates rather than a monolithic message from those with the most financial and/or political clout.

When our approach to managing caregivers is fear-based, mistrust is built into the provider/client relationship. Attempts to build in accountability and safeguard the rights of both parties go to extremes from exorbitant liability insurances to the aforementioned over-testing (both of which drive up the costs of services). Time with clients becomes a managed commodity, decreasing the tendency to listen to one another and build a healing relationship. Client resources are competed for, leading to attempts to try to do it all “in house” and minimize judicious referral to better fitting alternatives. Practitioners, clinics and hospitals become more concerned with market share than sharing resources. Again saying, “Let’s all get along and help one another” will not produce a major change unless we consciously restructure the reward system to promote more mutually beneficial scenarios.

The multi millions of dollars spent in the last few years to build facilities for the treatment of illness by large scale competing medical systems in SE Wisconsin insures a climate in which there is a big financial investment in our illness. Our major choices for healthcare then get limited to options generated by those who can entice/scare us into their brand of cure. A consultant to one large local health complex was told point blank by its administrator that a research proven alternative to a common medical procedure would never be promoted within their system because it did not generate as much income as current medical procedures needed to pay for their existing floor space and staffing costs.

A community-based approach to healthy lifestyle

InWellness has been founded on a cooperative approach to the promotion of community health. Valuing the input and the feedback of the entire community allows the strengths of the many to emerge rather than the interests of the few to prevail. InWellness has created a structure that facilitates this philosophy to grow and flourish.

When our healthcare system is built on competing fear-based interests, chaos ensues as witnessed by the fact that Americans are less healthy than ever and over-burdened with greater healthcare costs. It is estimated that 40% of the American population has chronic disease being treated with the most expensive treatments. The United States spends more than twice as much on each person for healthcare as most other industrialized countries. But it has fallen to last place among those countries in preventing deaths through use of timely and effective medical care. The US ranks 37th among industrialized countries in overall healthcare delivery by the World Health Organization. Insurance plans continue to raise premiums by double-digit percentages and provide less coverage. Research shows that a balanced lifestyle improves overall health. However, the bulk of healthcare spending is on services for the sick, NOT on

maintaining and promoting health. The healthcare system lacks supportive services that facilitate and motivate behavior changes needed to achieve and maintain a healthy daily lifestyle. Fortunately, we also live in an educated community that continues to cultivate options that respond to the need for healthcare to nurture the best possible health of the whole person: mind, body and spirit - the mission of InWellness.

The InWellness response

The InWellness initiative is addressing client empowerment and restructuring provider/client relations.

First: providers agree on a common philosophy of client empowerment that is backed up by an integrative service delivery, which includes signing on to Principles of Holistic Health Practitioners, facilitated provider intercommunication, client-centered health and wellness assessments, professional health navigators to educate clients and individualize wellness plans, educational presentations, community research on best practitioner and modality fit for clients and services for low income populations.

Second: the IW provider network safeguards the independence of providers to develop the quality of healing relationship with their clients that is right for their pace, setting and style of delivery while being highly ethical and cost effective. The network promotes provider excellence through peer meetings, educational forums and jointly sponsored projects.

It is by doing this in numbers that InWellness is beginning to create a viable positive impact on the wellbeing of our community.

Milwaukee's contribution to healthcare reform

InWellness presents a model for health and wellness education and provider service delivery that is a Milwaukee-style response to healthcare reform. We are in the heartland of our country and our core values of free education, personal empowerment, the importance of the practitioner/client healing relationship, transparency in service costs and community through arts and entertainment are sacred to us. It is time that we incorporate these core values into our health and wellness care. We further believe we are helping create a model that will be inspirational to other parts of our country.

Qualified independent providers and provider groups may contact InWellness at:

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