

Reclaiming Health and Balance In Wellness: Our Bodies and Our Healthcare System

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Most ancient healthcare systems operate on the principles of a balanced life, balance within a body's energy system and balance of the body in the nature and community in which it lives (e.g., Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine). There are overwhelming signs of disturbance we must address as individuals and as a community to regain our balance - and we can do it. But we cannot do it alone. We must work together to regain and live the principles of balance. It is not enough to just care for our individual bodies or just address our health care system. We must do both now.

Imbalance in our bodies from multiple changes in our lifestyles and environment are reflected in our current epidemic of epidemics. One in three children have allergies, asthma, ADHD, or autism spectrum disorders. More than 50 percent of adults have a chronic illness, including diabetes, cancer, heart disease, obesity, inflammatory bowel disease, auto-immune disease, or dementia. Understanding that these labels are not diseases but disruptions/imbalance in our basic biological control systems can lead to more effective treatment.

We have turned over responsibility for monitoring our bodies, growing our food and maintaining the quality of our environment to outside experts and abandoned our sensitivity to our internal systems and what we put in them. This is by no means hopeless, but it is alarming and at a critical point. We must return to awareness and partnering with healthcare givers rather than being processed by cleverly promoted profit-driven systems out of balance with their clients and their own employees.

Imbalance in our health care system is reflected in our track record. Americans are less healthy than ever and over-burdened with greater healthcare costs. It is estimated that 50 percent 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 health care 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.

Meanwhile, profits in the health care and drug industry have multiplied enormously while populations receiving inadequate care have steadily grown. The United States has the most

unequal income distribution among all the advanced economies in the world. Independent research shows that the U.S. tax and benefit system is one of the least effective in reducing poverty. A glaring example of growing imbalance comes in CEO compensation at these companies. In 1980 the CEO-to-worker pay ratio was 42:1 and by 2000 it had risen to 475:1. In contrast, Japan has the least disparity of income between the highest and lowest earners, spends only 33 cents to our dollar on healthcare and has an average life expectancy of 8-9 years longer than in the U.S.

Fortunately, we have a history in this country of righting imbalances that comes from the unity of people returning to principles of healthy balance and fair, compassionate practices. This goes back to our country's founders who made a declaration of independence from systems that had grown top-heavy with power and wealth.

One example of such a movement is a group of concerned independent health and wellness providers here in Milwaukee that has started a group called InWellness. Their goal is to reeducate our community to self-responsibility in its health, work as partners with clients in creating healthy lifestyles and foster a spirit of beauty and joy in the process by cosponsoring inspirational events, e.g., "Wellness and the Arts" at the Milwaukee Public Market October 17, 2010. This group is committed to transparency in its fee setting and to following the principles of practice it adapted from the American Board of Holistic Medicine.

Principles of Holistic Health and Wellness Practice

These principles are part of the agreement that all providers sign and agree to practice when becoming InWellness providers:

1. *Optimal health is the primary goal of holistic health and wellness practice.* It is the conscious pursuit of the highest level of functioning and balance of the physical, environmental, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of human experience, resulting in a dynamic state of being fully alive. This creates a condition of wellbeing regardless of the presence or absence of disease or other life challenges.
2. *The healing power of love.* Holistic health care practitioners strive to meet the client with grace, kindness, acceptance and spirit without conditions, emanating from the awareness that love is life's most powerful healer.
3. *Whole person.* Holistic health and wellness practitioners view people as the unity of body, mind, spirit and the systems in which they live.
4. *Prevention and treatment.* Holistic health and wellness practitioners promote health, prevent illness and help raise awareness of dis-ease and healthy lifestyles rather than merely managing symptoms. A holistic approach relieves symptoms, modifies contributing factors and enhances the client's life system to optimize future wellbeing.
5. *Innate healing power.* All people have innate powers of healing in their bodies, minds and spirits. Holistic health and wellness practitioners evoke, educate and help clients utilize these powers to affect the healing process.

6. *Integration of healing systems.* Holistic health and wellness practitioners embrace a lifetime of learning about all safe and effective options in diagnosis and treatment. These options come from a variety of traditions, and are selected in order to best meet the unique needs of the patient. The realm of choices may include lifestyle modification and complementary approaches as well as conventional drugs and surgery.

7. *Relationship-centered care.* The ideal practitioner-client relationship is a partnership that encourages client autonomy and values the needs and insights of both parties. The quality of this relationship is an essential contributor to the healing process.

8. *Individuality.* Holistic health and wellness practitioners focus client care on the unique needs and nature of the person who has a challenge to health and wellbeing rather than the challenge that the person has.

9. *Teaching by example.* Holistic health and wellness practitioners continually work toward the personal incorporation of the principles of holistic health, which in turn profoundly influence the quality of the healing relationship.

10. *Learning opportunities.* All life experiences including birth, joy, suffering and the dying process are profound learning opportunities for both clients and health and wellness practitioners.

This group shares its collective wisdom with each other to benefit InWellness clients rather than withhold and compete for market share. Providers also share their expertise with and educate each other rather than sequester their trade secrets.

This is one example and we need more alternatives. There is no one model that will solve all the issues of imbalance in our bodies and our healthcare system. But we must return to principles and we must work together if we are to thrive and grow as individuals and as a community. It is time to reclaim our inalienable rights to health, freedom and life in wellness.

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