

Integrative Medicine is Vital to Your Health

Dear Friend,



Martin Rossman, MD

I have been thinking a lot about Integrative Medicine lately. I want to share my thoughts about some of the principles and practices that have caused me to dedicate my life to practicing this way and the important contributions that Integrative medicine has to offer patients, physicians, and society alike. As always, I welcome your feedback, questions, and thoughts.

The First Principle: Do No Harm

“Primum Non Nocere” is a cherished medical principle dating back to the time of Hippocrates. It cautions us not to make anyone worse through treatment than they were already. It is a precaution that is violated every day in the practice of modern conventional medicine, especially in treating people with chronic medical conditions, and the harm done can be serious, even fatal.

Regrettably, modern medicine has become the 3rd or 4th leading cause of death in America. In 1998 the Journal of the American Medical Association published an article ascribing 106,000 deaths a year to adverse reactions to prescription medication in hospitals. For perspective, compare that to 40,000 deaths a year from breast cancer. Remarkably, and discouragingly, this number is for reactions to “properly prescribed” medications, not medical errors, which in themselves knock off another several hundred thousand Americans. While there is a very active movement in medicine to reduce the number of errors through better oversight and electronic medical records, there is little to no movement seriously looking at whether or not we really need to be on an average of 5 prescription medications at age 65, or whether there are real alternatives to “better living through chemistry.”

As a former Emergency Room physician, I can affirm that desperate times can call for desperate measures. When you are faced with treating acute heart attacks, multiple gunshot wounds, or injuries from a 54 car pileup on Hwy 5, it isn't the time for lifestyle counseling, or dietary change. In these situations, as with acute infections, flares of serious illnesses, heart attacks, strokes, or out of control infections, proper use of medications may save lives and reduce future illness or

disability. My hat is off to the many talented and dedicated surgeons, emergency room doctors, and specialists who treat patients with critical illness. With these conditions, the risk of heroic medical interventions is usually less than the risk of NOT using them.

But with the 90% or more of patients who have chronic conditions, stress related illnesses, chronic pain, inflammation, or evolving risk factors for illness, the situation is different. There is no need for 20,000 people a year to die from Advil, Alleve, and similar drugs when natural anti-inflammatory substances like turmeric, ginger, boswellia, and fish oils, taken at proper doses equal the effects of these medications after three weeks of regular use. There are no known side effects and NO DEATHS from any of these natural substances. A significant advantage, I think.

It is pretty safe to take the anti-inflammatory medications short term. They are hundreds of times more powerful than the nutrients, and they can give you quick temporary relief. But the longer you take the medications the more likely and severe the adverse effects because, like almost all pharmaceuticals, they work by interfering with normal cell functions. Over time, this can lead to stomach ulcers, bleeding, hypertension, liver and kidney damage.

The best way to integrate the advantages of both the medications and nutrients is to keep the inflammation down with an anti-inflammatory (basically Mediterranean) diet, supplements, and acupuncture, and use medications intermittently and sparingly for flare-ups. This maximizes benefits and minimizes risk.

Next time I will share with you a way I have found useful to assess the risks and benefits of almost any medical treatment, whether conventional, complementary, or alternative. Till then, I wish you the best of health and life.

Dr. Rossman

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