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Reflections on Integrative Medicine

BY DEBRA NELSON-HOGAN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND EDITOR OF *THE PAIN PRACTITIONER*

My Great Aunt Mae was a tough old bird. Born in the Oklahoma Territory to a family of “sooners”, she had outlived two husbands—rumor has it she drove them both to drink—and was lacking in frailty as any woman I ever met. One summer morning when I was around 14, and she was about 65, I was sitting in my grandma’s kitchen in Twin Falls, Idaho when she marched Aunt Mae. She took a plate out of the cupboard, plopped a cake of yeast on it, grabbed a fork from the drawer, and joined us at the table, where she started to eat. “For goodness sakes, Mae,” Grandma said, more than a little horrified, “what are you eating that for?” Aunt Mae replied that someone said it would help her arthritis pain and when I muttered that I thought it was pretty gross, she said, “Sister, I would eat horse manure if it would take away my pain.”

My grandmother also suffered from the cursed arthritis and every morning she rolled her tubby self out of bed and proceeded to do an hour’s worth of calisthenics because she believed it was all that kept her from being crippled. Whether or not it was the exercises or her belief in their power (or a bit of both) she died at the age of 95 with slightly gnarled fingers, but otherwise fairly flexible. Both of these women were using tools found in the integrative medicine toolbox: diet, exercise, and the power of the mind.

I grew up during that transition time when what some might call integrative care was still being practiced in the home and in doctor’s offices. This combination of body, mind, and spirit was characterized by chicken soup to cure colds, “kissing it better” to take away the pain of skinned knees, and the general idea that good health was rooted in drinking your milk and saying your prayers. However, with the baby boomer age came blockbuster drugs and miracle technology; new tools directed doctors for the most part to stop listening to people and to start treating diseases. Insurance companies that used to step in for catastrophic care now entered mainstream medicine and

began managed disease, not people. Dr. Gladys McGarey, who is interviewed in this issue, notes that after World War II, “we made a god out of science, and its temples are hospitals, medical schools, scientific laboratories, and even the government. This is out of proportion. The science of medicine deals with the study of disease, which is a deadly process. The art of medicine deals with the study of life, which is a healthy process and is filled with joy. Physicians need to look at the patient as a partner and patients need to have something to say about their own healing.”

More and more, patients are getting involved in their own healing and many are using complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and integrative care as the diving board. 2007 studies show that 38% of consumers have used some kind of complementary or alternative medicine, and if we include prayer, the statistic soars to a whopping 62% (1). Eastern practices, such as traditional Chinese medicine described in an interview with Dr. Nan Lu on page 30 are engaging people in new ways of viewing energy and health.

In the years since Aunt Mae gobbled her cake of yeast, huge amounts of research have been conducted on diet, stress, exercise, and the mind-body connection to wellness. No one today debates the effect that diet and nutrition have on overall health—just look at the studies of red wine and oatmeal on cholesterol—and in an interview on page 20 Dr. Bettina Herbert reminds us of the role that pro- and anti-inflammatory foods can have on people in pain. She also discusses the importance that stress management has on pain, and again, few doubt the importance of the relationship between the emotions, stress, and pain. Look at the growth and acceptance of therapeutic activities such as biofeedback, meditation, yoga, and Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zinn to reduce pain. Integrative medicine takes many old concepts of healing and is bringing them into the 21st century.

As the Academy moves mindfully toward an integrative model of pain management, Victoria Maizes, MD, executive director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, reminds us that “good medicine starts with good science,” and we applaud the levels of research out there. At a recent conference on *Integrative Pain Medicine: Conventional, Complementary and Alternative Approaches to Relieving Pain and Suffering* chaired by Scott Fishman, MD, and Dennis Warren, JD, of the UC Davis Health System, several presentations reinforced the role that the brain plays in pain and illustrated how neuroimaging helps validate it. Philippe Goldin, PhD, presented some stunning research on the Neuroscience of Mindfulness Interventions. His group uses neuroimaging to show the effect that mindfulness based stress reduction has on pain. That the brain controls pain is not new, but the technology to prove it continues to evolve and it is exciting stuff. At the same conference, Sean Mackey, MD, PhD, gave an outstanding talk on *Viewing the Brain in Pain through Neuroimaging*. He used fMRI to illustrate the factors that modulate pain and to help attendees understand the central systems responsible for the individual differences in pain and treatment responses to pain.

As the Academy folds integrative into its mission that was founded on interdisciplinary care and team approaches to pain management, we are ever mindful that the integrative care protocols that we support must be evidence-based. This is underscored by the level of programming at our Annual Clinical Meeting, which will be held October 8-11 in Phoenix. We invite you to join us for some wonderful presentations on both integrative and conventional medicine, where like minded members like you can network, discuss, and debate.

See you in October! ■

REFERENCES

1. Prayer and Spirituality in Health: Ancient Practices, Modern Science; CAM at the NIK, 2005. 12, 1. [http://nccam.nih.gov/news/ newsletter/2005_winter/prayer.htm](http://nccam.nih.gov/news/newsletter/2005_winter/prayer.htm) accessed August 1, 2009.

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