

## **Integrating Conservative Treatment into Your Health Care**

Integrative healthcare has been “all the buzz” for years now. However, just what does that mean?

For some, it means integrating all the disparate disciplines within the traditional medical model into a cohesive healthcare delivery system. In this model all the varied disciplines and hospital departments would work together and communicate with each other to improve the quality of patient care and to prevent unnecessary or redundant testing. Each healthcare professional would contribute their individual expertise to the development of a comprehensive healthcare/treatment plan incorporating not only the treatment of acute and chronic health conditions, but also, the development of a preventative health care strategy for each individual patient. This is quite a tall order in itself and has traditionally not included “alternative” health care providers such as chiropractors or naturopaths. However, in today’s healthcare industry, chiropractic is much more mainstream than it was even fifteen years ago and chiropractic care is often considered when healthcare providers are trying to develop a treatment strategy for their patients.

This is by no means a new concept. In 1974 I was working in a psychiatric hospital in Connecticut and within the confines of the hospital this concept was referred to as a “team” approach. The “team” incorporated professionals from the lowly psych aide to the august psychiatrist with all the other professionals - psychology, music and art therapy, nursing, etc – as members of the team. This worked very well at assuring good communication between all the various professionals and I saw first hand how it improved the quality of the care the patients received.

This “team” concept may have been the precursor to the modern concept of integrated healthcare. Today, chiropractors regularly receive referrals from medical doctors and other primary health care providers for the treatment of neck, low back, leg, or arm pain. Integration of chiropractic services saves the system a great deal of money. Over the last 30 years studies across the U.S. as well as Canada and Europe have shown that not only do patients with these complaints recover faster and have better long-term outcomes (6 to 12 months), but the treatment is less expensive and uses fewer advanced diagnostic tests.

As we contemplate what Integrative Wellness is today we should consider the responsibility that the patient has as well as the provider. With the pressures that primary care providers (PCP) are placed under by insurers who are paying less and demanding more, primary care providers have had to increase the volume of patients they see within a given period of time. Often, this leads to the PCP having less time with each patient while they are under a higher degree of stress. Patients need to be aware of other treatment options and approaches and should not be afraid to recommend them to their PCP. Sometimes the PCP will not recommend a specific treatment approach either because they are unaware of it – it is impossible to know everything - or feel that the patient will not be amenable to it.

Patients have the opportunity today to become much more aware of what their treatment options are. There are a number of good websites to help them educate themselves about their specific condition. Two of which are WebMD.com and Spinehealth.com. By being more informed about what is wrong with them, patients can ask more intelligent questions about their condition, more effectively enquire about other treatment approaches, and avoid time consuming and often expensive delays in the delivery of that treatment.

It has been estimated that as much as 85% of the back surgery for disc herniation in this country is medically unnecessary. This procedure is very expensive, requires considerable recuperation, and may have serious side effects. One of the other main considerations with this type of surgery is permanent impairment. The *AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment*, fifth edition, awards a permanent impairment of 10-13% for "...individuals who had surgery for radiculopathy but are now asymptomatic." In other words, they have had back surgery for leg pain but no longer have any symptoms. This is in contrast to someone who had a herniated disc and radiculopathy but who "no longer has the radiculopathy following conservative treatment" for whom the guide awards them a 5-8% impairment. This is important because these numbers are "permanent" and will follow the patient for life. This may well affect their ability to get certain insurances or the costs of those they do get. It may also interfere with a person's ability to get a job. This is just one example how integrating conservative treatment approaches into one's health and wellness programs can improve their health and save them money.

By being self educated and proactive patients can prevent having unnecessary procedures and take the more conservative approaches. Integrating all forms of healthcare into the more traditional medical model is a concept whose time has come. In this information age, with information about conditions and their treatment just a mouse click away, those patients who take the time and make the effort to educate themselves about both, will have better outcomes and be more satisfied with their interaction with the healthcare community.