

# Health and Wellness for the New Millennium

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## ALTERNATIVES IN WELLNESS

Decisions, decisions. HMO's, conventional medical plans, new drugs and treatments, how about "Alternative" methods of health and wellness?

As we approach the new millennium, there has been an increased awareness of alternative health modalities and an increased interest in holistic health. These alternative methods of wellness are nothing new. What is new is the mainstream acceptance that has been developing in recent years. People have begun to realize the great benefits that alternative wellness can provide. This is especially true when used in balance with modern medical methods.

I have been involved in alternative health methods virtually all of my life. It started with my involvement in very traditional Shaolin Kung-Fu training over thirty-eight years ago. Acupressure, acupuncture, shiatsu, herbology, meditation, and the like have been part and parcel to traditional Shaolin training for over three thousand years. My background and connection to these alternative methods and ancient arts provided me with the great opportunity to study many alternative health methods long before they were trendy, popular or accepted. My studies in the mid eighties in meditation, in fact, are what led me into my profession as a hypnotherapist. Even though these wonderful methods for maintaining health have existed for a very long time, only now are they beginning to gain widespread acceptance in the US under the newer labels of holistic and/or alternative health. Western medicine, insurance companies, as well as the general public now realize what many of us who have been involved in alternative wellness have long advocated. It is better, cheaper, and easier to live healthy and to stay well than it is to cure the problem after your health has declined. As well, it is important to realize that herbology was the forerunner of modern pharmacology. To date, while holistic practitioners have advocated healthy alternatives, western medicine and the pharmaceutical companies, for the most part, have continued to focus on curative medicine. That is to say striving to recover wellness after it has been lost. We prefer the concept of cultivating and maintaining wellness.

## EXACT SCIENCE

The most common complaint about holistic modalities is that "they are not an exact science". For example, western physicians have commented to me that "they don't know for certain how acupuncture works so they won't advocate it's use" and "there is not enough scientific data about herbs to utilize them". Personally I believe, if they prove helpful to those using them and if there is no body of evidence of harm from their use, there is no reason to oppose their use. This is not to say that care should not be taken. It certainly should be. Experienced holistic practitioners who have made a career of these studies should be consulted if you plan to use herbs and natural remedies outside the perimeters of the use of common vitamins and minerals. This is for two reasons. First, for best results natural remedies must be used in proper amounts just as with

pharmaceuticals. This is simply a matter of common sense. Secondly, even though side effects are far less common with natural remedies, you can waste a lot of money purchasing homeopathic supplements that simply may not be right for you. It is best to seek the advice of a skilled professional.

To those who view holistic wellness as an inexact science be aware that western medicine as well is not an exact science. How many times have you gone to more than one physician and had them all give a totally different diagnosis as to what was wrong. How many times have you known a physician to change a patient's medication two, three, four, or more times until that physician found the one that he or she felt would work. How often has someone had surgery and found the cure to be worse than the original ailment. This certainly doesn't sound like an exact science, but it doesn't deter most of us from going to a physician. The fact is that neither holistic health methods nor modern western medicine are exact sciences. The best results are achieved through a balance of both.

## **HOLISTIC HEALTH**

The goal of holistic health is to promote health and wellness. The idea is to create both a physical and mental state of balance that better equips the body to ward off illness and/or to repair naturally. If illness should occur, conservative methods and natural remedies can be a wonderful first line of defense as opposed to chemical medications that can often have side effects or be toxic to the body. I believe that most intelligent thinking people would find this concept reasonable. On the other hand, if my appendix is about to burst, please get me a good surgeon. An intelligent balance of alternative and modern techniques can provide the best benefits for health and vitality.

## **WESTERN MEDICINE AND HOLISTIC WELLNESS**

If you want to know why western medicine is now singing a different tune about holistic wellness I have the answer. follow the money. There are certainly many sincere conventional medical practitioners. Many of them see the benefits of homeopathy for their patients. There are also some who now see a golden goose in alternative wellness. Maybe some fall somewhat into both categories.

For those of us that are in the holistic professions there has been an up and a down side to the new enthusiasm for alternative methodologies. The down side is simple. Years ago medical doctors, for the most part, scoffed at holistic and alternative health methods. They condemned everything from chiropractic to acupuncture as hooey. Now that the public is accepting and benefiting from these methods many medical professionals not only want a piece of the pie, they want to control the pie's distribution and the public's access to those alternative methods. The fact is, however, that a western physician's training is far different than that of a holistic practitioner. Holistic practitioners are primarily concerned with and trained in how to maintain health and wellness and promote well-being (physically, mentally, and emotionally). In effect, they are trained to help in keeping you from becoming ill and/or to reduce the severity if illness should occur. Western physicians, for the most, are trained in how to evaluate symptoms and cure disease. The approaches, although both valuable, are

significantly different.

A couple of years ago the AMA, pharmaceutical companies, and other medical groups lobbied to make vitamins and natural supplements available by prescription only. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why. Since these factions cannot patent natural substances (herbs, minerals, etc.), as can be done with synthesized medications, they simply sought to find another way to get into your pocket and make a profit. Making vitamins, etc. available by prescription only would have been a way to accomplish this. The fact is, we simply don't hear of mass deaths from ginseng or daily vitamins. I'm sure that far more people are injured by lightning strikes. When was the last time that you hear of someone being rushed to the hospital due to an overdose of Ginkgo Baloba.

I know of highly skilled people in the field of acupuncture who had been practicing for decades either in the US or overseas. They can no longer practice in many states. Many states require that you either be a physician or be working under the direction of a physician to perform acupuncture because it involves the insertion of needles. Although these skilled professionals are prohibited from practicing, it is often easy for a western physician to take a brief quickie course in acupuncture and then add acupuncture to his or her list of services. scary isn't it ! If tattooing becomes more popular, it would seem to follow that it as well could be classified in the same way.

Another example is apparent in my field of hypnotherapy. Myself as well as many of my colleagues have hundreds if not thousands of hours of hypnotherapy training. Many of us, myself included, continue studying in order to upgrade our knowledge and abilities on an ongoing basis. There are those in the psychiatric field who would like to see hypnotherapy come under their umbrella even though their own hypnotherapy training is scant by comparison. The reason - because of the growing acceptance of hypnotherapy (thanks to those of us who have persevered through the lean years), the conventional western medical community now smells a cash cow and they want it in their barn.

Hypnotherapy is a totally different and unique field. Contrary to popular belief, in hypnotherapy the methods and training are different than those studied in psychiatry or psychology. Psychiatrists and psychologists serve a needed and useful purpose. They can do great things to help people. when they work within their own field and base of knowledge. The fact is, however, they are no more qualified to practice alternative methods such as NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), hypnotherapy, or other alternative modalities, than an alternative practitioner is to practice medicine.

### **THE UP SIDE**

The up side is that we in the holistic professions are now able to help far more people than in the past because of the growing interest in and acceptance of homeopathy. Can we help everybody ? No of course we can't. Do we have a one hundred percent track record of success? Of course not. But then neither do western medical practitioners. These are both inexact sciences.

I am not putting down western medicine by a long shot. It is an honorable and essential profession. There are many caring and competent professionals in the medical profession. As well, I am not implying that all holistic practitioners are what they should be. Just as in western medicine, you have good, bad, and varying degrees in between. Further, I have no objection to the licensing of holistic health professions. In fact, I support it. Holistic practitioners, however, should be licensed as the separate and unique professions they are. The important consideration is to give the public options and "alternatives" and let them make their own decision.

### **BALANCE OF CONVENTIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE**

The public will benefit from dedicated practitioners of both homeopathy and western medicine, who truly desire to help people to a healthier life. In the same way that you should interview a medical doctor to see if he or she fits your needs, you should interview any alternative health professional whose services you plan to use. Find out what they specialize in (hypnotherapy, NLP, acupuncture, herbology, etc.). Is the practitioner deeply involved in a particular specialty or does he or she attempt to be a "Jack of all trades". You want someone who has an in-depth knowledge of his or her field. a specialist, not a Jack of all trades.

A holistic practitioner will normally take far more time with you than someone in western medical practice. Ask for a consultation to see if the person you are considering seems knowledgeable about their field (this can be by phone or in person). Decide for yourself if the person's claims sound reasonable (holistic modalities can be very beneficial but they are not a magic bullet). At the same time make sure that your expectations are realistic.

With a balance holistic methods and modern medical methods you can vastly improve the quality of your life. Just as we in the holistic fields are not medical doctors, medical professionals are not generally schooled in holistic wellness. It is my hope that practitioners of both philosophies will strive to put prejudices and egos aside and work for the good of those who come to us for help. It is my hope in the years to come to see holistic/alternative practitioners and medical professionals working side by side for the benefit of those we serve. With a balance of Western and alternative wellness methods, great things can be accomplished.

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