

Functional Medicine

Written by Glenda

Many of you are interested in the healing arts and new advances in health care. Many may have healing issues. Therefore, I thought you would find some profound value in this interview with Dr. Mark Hyman, M.D. about his innovative approach to healing. It is very consonant with the teachings of Jeshua about first addressing the power of wholeness before addressing the symptoms of disease.

He was asked: "What kind of doctor are you?" You're an MD, but you have an expanded approach to healing. Are you an alternative doctor, an integrative doctor, a holistic doctor, a natural doctor?

He answered: "I'm none of the above!"

"In fact, I trained as a family doctor because I was interested in everything and wanted to learn every part of medicine. I couldn't see how the body could be separated into specialties. I just could not imagine that somehow all the symptoms people had were unrelated. So I kept searching for a different approach.

I became interested in nutrition and diet as a way of helping improve the health of my patients and studied Chinese medicine, herbs, and alternative methods of healing. But many of these methods fell short. They are all part of what is called Green Medicine. Green Medicine uses an herb or drug or alternative treatment to treat a disease, as we understand it, in conventional medicine. For example, using feverfew to treat migraines; saw palmetto to treat an enlarged prostate; glucosamine to treat arthritis; or St. John's wart to treat depression can all be considered Green Medicine. While these treatments might be less toxic and even effective in some people, they still don't help us to understand and treat the individual, not the disease.

Finally, I discovered the type of medicine that I wanted to practice. It's called Functional Medicine, or Systems Medicine. And I believe that it's the future of medicine. It is an entirely new GPS navigational system in the world of health and illness."

How is Functional Medicine different than alternative, integrative, or even conventional medicine?

"First, let's define the differences between all these different labels and types of medicine.

Alternative medicine includes ancient traditions and new techniques, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, homeopathy, herbal medicine, and newer

health techniques such as chiropractic, energy medicine, and even orthomolecular medicine. All of these systems can have great benefit in treating chronic disease. And these alternative modalities are often effective and complementary to other therapies.

In fact, the way they view health and disease is similar to that of Functional Medicine. Like Functional Medicine, many of these other types of medicine take into account web-like relationships between all aspects of a person's health. That's especially true for Traditional Chinese Medicine. While one uses ancient metaphors to look at patterns through the pulse, tongue, and energy of the body, the other looks at natural patterns in biology.

But Functional Medicine goes a step farther. It uses the latest scientific understanding about how our genetics, environment, and lifestyle interact as a whole system to diagnose and treat diseases based on patterns of imbalance and dysfunction -- without treating the disease specifically.

Functional Medicine treats the person who has the disease, not the disease that has the person!"

Isn't that like integrative medicine? "Well, integrative medicine purports that we must integrate alternative healing modalities into conventional medicine so that patients have the opportunity to receive all those benefits when they are appropriate. It means in part that patients can get acupuncture or herbs along with their drugs or surgery, for example. This movement is now being taught in a growing number of medical schools and hospitals throughout the country, has been pioneered by the great visionary physician Dr. Andrew Weil, and is a good step forward in the evolution of medicine.

The difference is, while integrative medicine puts together (or integrates) all the modalities of healing, Functional Medicine has for its foundation the proposition that all systems of a body and person ARE INTEGRATED, and to separate them into parts weakens the healing potential.

You see, the next step in the evolution of medicine requires us to deeply question the foundations of conventional reductionistic medicine, which focuses on naming diseases. That foundation is useful -- sometimes. It allows physicians to name a disease and then find the drug or treatment for that disease. It works well for dramatic and sudden or acute diseases such as trauma, infection, and emergencies. Unfortunately, it fails miserably in the care of the chronic diseases that affect 125 million Americans. Those conditions include allergic, digestive, hormonal, neurologic, and metabolic problems -- which many suffer from on a daily basis.

Thankfully, the advance of scientific understanding of biology has provided an opportunity for an entirely new way of approaching diseases based on systems thinking.

This new approach is called Functional Medicine.”

Functional Medicine is deeply science-based.

It has emerged from new discoveries in what are called systems biology -- the understanding of the deep interconnections of the basic systems of the body. Systems biology is so important that it's a key part of the agenda of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and their New Roadmap Initiative. The director the NIH, Dr. Elias Zerhouni, is attempting to completely reorganize scientific research and knowledge around systems biology and is spending hundreds of millions of dollars toward this effort.

And that's not all. Entire new organizations, such as the Institute for Systems Biology (ISB), have been established to bring these discoveries to the consumer. Dr. Leroy Hood, the founder of the ISB, is a Nobel prize-winning biologist who has devoted his work to exploring this radical and paradigm-shifting notion. He says: "Studying the interaction and interplay of many levels of biological information, systems biology will enable us to not only cure complex disease but to predict an individual's health and extend the human body's natural lifespan by preventing diseases. The new era of predictive, preventive and personalized medicine-- made possible by application of systems biology -- represents a profound shift in the practice of medicine and will reach into many corners of our lives."

That's because, in systems biology, NAMING diseases becomes increasingly meaningless as we understand the inner workings and function of our cells and biological systems within the context of our entire organism. You see, disease occurs because of the body's attempt to correct underlying imbalances. It is the body's best attempt to deal with a difficult set of circumstances.

Doctors who practice Functional Medicine believe that health depends on your constitution, which is partly genetic, and partly determined by your lifestyle and environment. Your constitution can also be called your "biological terrain." This determines your resilience and capacity for self-repair and healing.

In fact, Functional Medicine is founded on a number of key principles.

First -- we are all different. Each person is genetically and biochemically unique and has to be treated as such.

Second -- everything that happens within us is connected in a complicated network or web of relationships. Understanding those relationships allows us to see deep into the functioning of the body.

Third -- your body has the capacity for self-regulation, which expresses itself through a dynamic balance of all your body systems.

Fourth -- we have the capacity to enhance and optimize our organ reserve and prevent nearly all the disease of aging.

And last but not least -- health is not just the absence of disease, but a state of profound and resilient positive vitality.

This new medicine is personalized. It treats the individual, not diseases. And it supports the normal healing mechanisms of the body, rather than attacking disease directly.

But what does this mean with real examples?

Well, it means that an infection or cancer requires a weakened immune system to take root.

It means that imbalances in your intestinal tract's bacteria flora trigger inflammation throughout your body and can lead to autoimmune diseases and arthritis. And it means that deficiencies in folate and vitamin B12 prevent your body from producing the neurotransmitters that help to balance your mood.

So you can either take antibiotics or use toxic chemotherapy drugs to attack the infection or cancer, or you can discover how and why your immune system is not protecting you. You can take powerful anti-inflammatory drugs for autoimmune diseases or you can change your diet and feed the healthy bacteria the fiber they love, and even help to "re-plant" new healthy bacteria back in your gut. You can take an antidepressant for depression or you can take folate and vitamins B12 and B6 to help your neurotransmitters, including serotonin, function better.

It is far better to consider the body's systems when analyzing patterns of imbalance or dysfunction that give rise to symptoms.

The principle systems are: * Your immune system * Your detoxification system * Your hormonal and neurotransmitter system * Your energy production system * Your acid-base system * Your redox system (the balance of oxidants and antioxidants in your body) * Your structural system * Your mind-body/body-mind system * Your nutritional balance

All these systems form a roadmap -- a new GPS system that allows the Functional Medicine practitioner to navigate without getting lost in the sea of diseases.

Health is the ability to maintain resiliency and balance and to respond effectively to life's challenges, whether these challenges are germs, toxins, allergens, stresses, or poor food

choices.

So how can you stay healthy and resilient? Actually, it's quite simple. You need to learn what makes you run and make sure you provide it to yourself. You have to learn what works for you and doesn't. And you must learn what makes you thrive and what depletes your health and life force. Sounds easy, but it isn't always.

That's it -- really!

The trick is identifying YOUR particular needs and the right balance for you.

How can you get and stay healthy?

For 80 percent of people, simply getting what you need to thrive will lead to robust good health.