Introduction to the Principles of Integrative Medicine (IM)

GUEST EDITORS
ELIZABETH KO, MD
FRED J. SCHIFFMAN, MD

While there are many definitions of health, the definition by the World Health Organization in 1948 is widely endorsed:

“...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease.”

Although medical advances have saved and improved the lives of millions, medicine has primarily focused on addressing the immediate events of disease, with less emphasis on the underlying factors that contribute to illness. The widespread use of this definition supports how the perception of health is gradually shifting from health as “absence-of-disease” to a much more all-encompassing idea of prevention and wellness.

The interest in lower cost, effective, holistic, evidence-based approaches to prevention and treatment of disease is growing. In 2007, nearly two of five Americans reported use of therapies such as massage, yoga, meditation and supplements. Such therapies accounted for $34 billion in out-of-pocket expenditures. This interest is growing along with, and fueled by, the growth in knowledge about the relationship between health and the more intangible elements of the healing process. Some of these practices are based on experiences of cultures over time, some based on evolving scientific theories, some based on little more than speculation. Regardless, each compels an inquiry of what is lacking in the conventional healthcare system that prompts so many to turn elsewhere for healing. The challenge remains to determine which models and approaches to healthcare, conventional or alternative, might best integrate the science and achieve the outcomes that patients and providers desire.

The Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, established by Andrew Weil, MD, in 1994, defines integrative medicine as healing-oriented medicine that takes account of the whole person, including all aspects of lifestyle. Patients and practitioner are partners in the healing process, which uses both conventional and alternative methods to facilitate the body’s innate healing response. All factors that influence health, wellness and disease are taken into consideration, including mind, spirit and community. Good medicine is based on good science, which is inquiry-driven and open to new paradigms. The most effective, least invasive interventions should be used whenever possible.


References


Guest Editors
Elizabeth Ko, MD
Clinical Instructor,
Internal Medicine
UCLA Health
eko@mednet.ucla.edu

Fred J. Schiffman, MD, MACP
Sigal Family Professor of Humanistic Medicine; Vice Chair of Medicine, Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University
fschiffman@lifespan.org

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