

# Introduction to the Principles of Integrative Medicine (IM)

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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.<sup>1</sup> Such therapies accounted for \$34 billion in out-of-pocket expenditures.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM), in their report on Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public Summit, identified care coordination as a major and growing need for those with and without chronic disease. Five chronic conditions – diabetes, heart disease, asthma, hypertension and depression – account for more than half of all U.S. health expenditures.<sup>4</sup> Most of these conditions can be adequately managed although only 55 percent of the most recommended clinical

preventive services are actually delivered.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, care coordination that emphasizes wellness and prevention remains the hallmark of integrative medicine.

Harvey Fineberg, MD, president of IOM, states that there are five critical dimensions to integrative medicine:<sup>6</sup>

- **Broad definition of health:** Health is more than the absence of disease; it is a state of physical, emotional and social well-being.
- **Wide range of interventions:** Integrative medicine explores the spectrum of healing, from prevention to treatment to recovery.
- **Coordination of care:** Emphasizes coordination across all providers, caregivers and institutions.
- **Patient-centered care:** Services are provided for and around the individual patient.
- **Variety of modalities:** Integrative medicine is open to not just usual care, but to unconventional modalities that help patients manage, maintain and restore health.

In this special section of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*, we explore several ideas and opinions that contributors believe will contribute to the achievement of the WHO's definition of health. The challenge remains to create a seamless engagement by patients and providers of the full range of physical, emotional, social and psychological factors known to be effective and necessary for the achievement of optimal health.

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