



Functional and Naturopathic Medicine: Now is the Time to Say, “Yes! I Am Ready!”

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“The doctor of the future will give no medication but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, diet, and in the cause and prevention of disease”.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Over 175 years ago, the famous United States essayist and visionary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote about the possibilities of how future generations might engage with medicine, health, and disease. This future has been arriving rapidly over the last many decades.

Yes, allopathic medicine, which centers around disease management and primarily focuses on using drugs and surgery, has long been respected as a standard of excellence. Deeply devoted doctors, nurses, and many kinds of medical support practitioners have been most often the first to be consulted as the primary authorities for people with physical and mental symptoms. The focus on treating diseases as taught in medical schools has been funded by drug and food companies in order to establish research on the effectiveness of this orientation. The inter-relationships between corporate profits and belief systems about what is needed or what is the only way to treat diseases has often been unclear or disguised at best.

At the beginning of the 1900s, several European MDs promoted approaches in the U.S. to deal with disease by encouraging the body's innate healing capabilities, using natural therapies to correct imbalances. "Naturopathic medicine" was thereby named and has thrived in many areas of the world. Gradually over the decades, more research is becoming available on the benefits of “natural drugs” in herbs and food, and on different amounts of nutrients than the nation's minimum daily requirements, which avoid disease yet do not promote optimal function.

In the last fifty years, Jeff Bland, PhD, has been one of the most respected academic voices in the medical world in bringing practitioners together to appreciate that they do not have to be an “alternative” to a model based on more natural approaches. He coined the term “functional medicine” and became the Pied Piper for this approach. Through his scientific research and books Dr. Bland has created medical academies and programs that certify medical doctors and other allied health professionals. These credentialed physicians are trained as educators to integrate many different ways to diagnosis and treat patients— beyond the usual allopathic medical school studies.

There are many medical traditions from around the world that respect how to use the medicinal value in food, herbs, and concentrated nutrients. Naturopathic medicine is one system that trains physicians in how to initiate a person's inherent ability to heal using many kinds of natural therapies. The focus of engagement is to treat people as individuals with different strengths and weaknesses, and not treat just numbers or disease conditions. The content of what naturopathic doctors or functional medicine doctors recommend might complement or replace synthetic drugs or improve surgical outcomes. The context of focusing on lifestyle and mind-body interrelationships, along with coaching clients on how to access their deepest wisdom to access their profound capacity for healing can be more radically different than any prescription.

A key component of why many patients appreciate naturopathic or functional medicine is the kind of partnership they develop with their body, and the learning they receive from their doctors. This is not about replacing all medication with vitamin supplements or radical diets. This is about learning to listen to our physical sensations, knowing a bit more about how our body works and what foods might help or hinder optimal energy, and how stress and

challenging emotions and feelings need healthy outlets for expression. Some NDs and functional medicine docs are also holistically oriented and appreciate that we humans are a quadrinity, meaning that the sum of us is greater than all the parts: we are physical, mental, emotional and spiritual beings. And the appreciation of the inter-relationships of these aspects often suffers when we overly focus only on one part at the expense of the others.

Wellness is an orientation to understanding that we are a quadrinity. When we live in the world from that point of view, we develop attitudes that are aligned with inspiration and gratitude—even when we are deeply challenged. Wellness is an attitude and mindset of how we perceive and interpret circumstances that open possibilities for us to experience healing. Healing is not inherent in things or in the external world.

“The doctor of the future will give fewer medications and will educate clients about learning about what initiates optimizing health and deeper healing by opening conversations of possibilities about the nature of nourishing and nurturing our body—code word: ‘body’”.

How to care for our human “body suit” with food, air, movement, and liquids in a context of listening to our emotions, while appreciating a larger view of life that includes how to contribute to others and connect with different rhythms of life, are some of the passions that many doctors know can be powerful allies to age gracefully—as well treat some of the most complicated diseases.

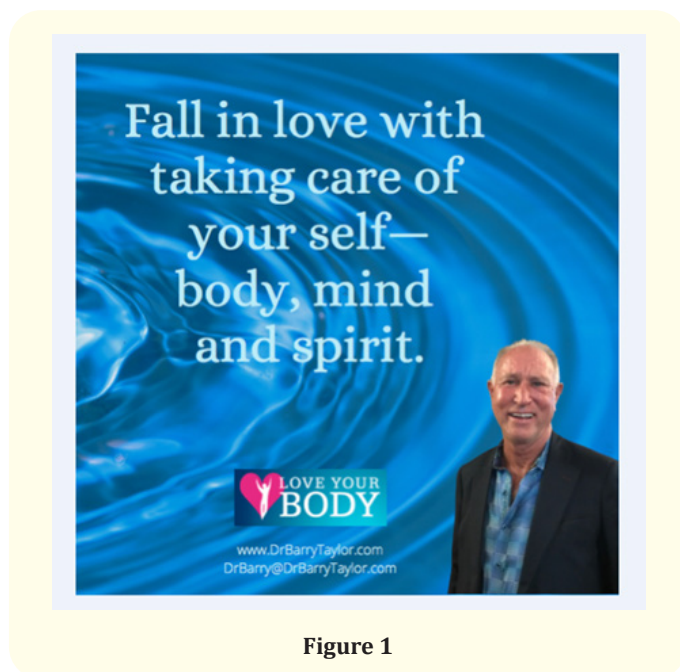


Figure 1