

# Doctor ‘mindful’ of body, spirit



Dr. Mary Ann Wallace talks about the evolution of her interest in eating for a healthy life. (Sobel Wiggins | Gazette-Times)

*By Rachel Beck, Gazette-Times reporter | Posted: Monday, January 4, 2010 11:40 pm*

Thirty years ago, Mary Ann Wallace came to Corvallis on a lark. She was living in Phoenix with her now-former husband when they decided to take a trip. Wallace chose the destination.

“I closed my eyes, I put my finger on the map,” she said. She touched Corvallis, so that’s where they went. They loved it.

“Two weeks later, we moved,” she said.

The spontaneity paid off, but Wallace — now Dr. Wallace — brings a very thoughtful approach to her

work and helps her patients consider the “whys” behind their actions.

The developer and former director of the integral medicine program for Good Samaritan Health Services, in 2006 Wallace created Mindful Eating classes to help address and prevent obesity.

“I asked myself, what really would make a difference for people?” she said. She’s identified some of the main problems that contribute to obesity: not knowing when enough is enough; eating to address feelings and considering fat to be actual food.

“We’re a society so much in a hurry and so unaware of what we’re feeling at the most basic level,” she said.

Wallace now works independently, teaching workshops and giving presentations on “mindbody issues.”

Tonight at 6 p.m., Wallace will present “Mindful eating: What does that mean, really?” at FireWorks Restaurant.

She’ll also be signing her book, “Mindful Eating, Mindful Life,” published in late 2009 by Inkwater Press, which is “a practical, down-to-earth guide,” Wallace said.

Participants in Wallace’s course had asked her to recommend a book that followed principles of the class.

“There were none at the time, so I wrote it,” she said.

The series and the book (which comes with a CD) address motivations for eating, something Wallace said most people haven’t thought much about.

“It’s a beautiful experience for so many people to question, for the first time in their lives, what are they hungry for?” she said.

Her approach to eating stems from her background in integral medicine, a field she pictures as a vertical and horizontal axis. On the vertical axis is everything that goes into a person’s well-being besides physical biology: emotions, spirituality, family. On the horizontal axis are different care providers and treatments.

Non-Western healing traditions are a part of integral medicine.

“Different cultures bring a wealth of different information,” she said.

Wallace herself went to a U.S. medical school and has been trained in Oriental medicine. How she approaches healing has been influenced by both.

At Good Samaritan, “I was fairly adamant about ensuring that providers I brought in were engaged in practices that had some roots in evidence,” she said. “Just because something is alternative doesn’t make it better.”

However, there are treatments that have been around for thousands of years, she said, that just haven’t gone through the Western process.

“That just isn’t the only way to decide if something works,” she said.

Wallace’s medical background is extensive. She had a masters in counseling and was working as a nurse when she saw a female doctor speak at a conference. “Physician” was a job title she’d never thought was open to her, but suddenly she realized it was exactly what she wanted to be. She started working toward her degree the next week.

Her Medical College Admission Test scores were among the top in the nation, and she entered Oregon Health Sciences University. She earned her medical degree in 1997.

Spirituality, however, plays as much of a role in her life as her education has. She credits regular meditation with getting her through the frantic pace of medical school. Together with musician Suzannah Doyle of Corvallis, Wallace has released several meditation and healing CDs. Wallace’s expertise is “going deeply into the roots from which decisions are made and true change happens,” according to her Web site.

It’s not just how she practices medicine; it’s how she practices life. “I really base the decisions that I make in life on asking ‘does this seem to be in keeping with a path of peace, with not doing harm?’” she said.