



Article by Mary Ann Wallace, MD, MA

An integrated approach reaps health benefits

www.maryannwallace.com

Much has been written about integrative medicine in the past number of years. The words “integrative,” “complementary” and “alternative” often carry multiple meanings, which can be confusing. There are also many aspects of integrative medicine, some of them with incredible claims and practices which may seem too preposterous to lead to healing. However, as patients and physicians alike are discovering, an integrative approach can help patients where conventional western medicine has fallen short. For purposes of this article, we will focus on describing “integrative medicine” in terms of its current application at Samaritan Health Services, Division of Integrative Medicine, which operates primarily out of the Heartspring Wellness Center in Corvallis.

Integrative medicine focuses on treating the whole person—mind, body and spirit—not just the disease. In order to acknowledge each healing aspect in a patient, practitioners use these principles to guide their practice:

- true healing occurs most readily when all aspects of a human being are acknowledged (body, mind, emotions, spirit);
- at any given time, different parts of these aspects may need attention for healing,
- healing is not the same as curing, and transcends the biochemical structure;
- suffering originates from a deeper place than biochemistry or biomechanics, and requires deeper attention than a simple biochemical or mechanical fix;
- suffering is not the same as “just pain”;
- it is our suffering we long to have eased, in addition to the more superficial and temporary components of our discomfort.

To the end of addressing these deeper issues, integrative medicine focuses on creating space and situations within which individuals can feel safe to delve into the mysteries of their own Being. This is not simple psychology, and we do not espouse such platitudes as “mind over matter.” Rather, the body and mind are recognized as inseparable, and that whatever is going on, either physically or psychologically, influences the whole person.

When an individual recognizes themselves as the driver and central decision maker in their health plan, there are a number of benefits, to include the following:

- greater likelihood of following through with treatment plans;
- a willingness to delve more deeply into what is actually going on (rather than expecting a “quick fix” from the practitioner);
- an eagerness to try new things/habits/behaviors;

- all the innate health benefits that have been clearly documented when a person feels empowered in their own life, such as increased immune function and more rapid healing.

The benefits of addressing more of the whole picture seem self evident. When we acknowledge that our experience—for health or illness—is more than just a biochemical phenomenon, we open the door to create a much larger playing field for change. There truly isn't a pill to cure every single thing that ails us. Sometimes we need to look to our lives, our behaviors, our attitudes and our stuck places to make a difference.

Mary Ann Wallace, MD, MA, was the former Medical Director for the SHS Division of Integrative Medicine. She can be reached at www.maryannwallace.com