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Choices

You shouldn't have to decide between traditional medicine and natural alternatives

by Mary Jo Ruggieri

You have been diagnosed with shoulder rotator impingement. Lifting your arm above your shoulder is impossible. You have numbness in the fingers and your mid chest aches. The medical solution is to take anti-inflammatories and muscle relaxants, which aggravate your stomach. Your doctor says not much more can be done right now, but you may be headed for surgery. Are there any other options?

When someone is diagnosed with a difficult health problem, it's tough to decide which treatment is best. If you fear surgery or want to avoid invasive treatments, who can help you decide what other alternatives are available?

Most medical doctors can give you little if any advice about non-invasive therapies that may be beneficial, let alone point you toward a qualified holistic practitioner. On a positive note, though, I believe change is on the horizon.

Last Saturday, I had the privilege of being one of the keynote speakers at the Second Annual Alternative Medicine Seminar sponsored by the American Medical Women's Association. The seminar focused on the need for a partnership between Western allopathic medicine and complementary alternative medicine. We, the consumers who are saying "no" to the more invasive therapies and asking for other options, are driving the need for this partnership.

The ability to select and combine appropriate approaches for integrative health care--or the ability to work with qualified alternative practitioners--gives traditional physicians familiar with complementary protocols a distinct advantage. The complementary practitioners who also know how to refer to and work with physicians and medical practitioners will also have an advantage. The holistic patient wants to be educated about health care options. They want to use alternative treatments along with medical care--it is not an either/or choice. So the inevitable partnership is for holistic and medical practitioners to learn how to work with each other for the benefit of the client. Imagine that concept!

Some of the more exciting cases I have worked with are the ones that have utilized an integrated approach. One interesting case was a 38-year-old woman who decided to try a holistic bodywork

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approach for her frozen shoulder before committing to surgery. Her doctor was familiar with polarity therapy and supported her decision. The first phase of polarity work helped her to identify areas in her upper body where she held stress. The second phase helped her analyze the holding patterns of this stress, like finding what caused the traffic jam. The third phase helped her associate what repetitive movements caused the holding patterns and the fourth phase helped her release the stress pattern, and return her movements to normal. In polarity, the shoulder area is energetically associated with air and breathing structures, so the polarity work she was doing corrected the breathing mechanics that contributed to her frozen shoulder. Specific contact points released muscle tension and gentle rocking movements helped her release constrictions in the rib area.

In conjunction with polarity therapy, she was working with an herbalist on stress management and her doctor continued to medically assess her progress, reporting the results to her as the client and to me as her polarity practitioner. Her shoulder healed, she did not have to have surgery, and her doctor was pleased with her progress.

At the Alternative Medicine Seminar, I met a very energetic, dedicated, forward-thinking medical doctor, Kimberly Sterns. Sterns runs a center that specializes in natural health care choices and practices a combined approach with her clients. Her center includes two medical doctors, an acupuncturist, chiropractor, massage therapist, polarity and reiki practitioners, herbal and vitamin consultants and homeopathy. Their goal at the Sterns Health Center is to help clients participate and make choices in their own health care and to provide a traditional medical treatment along with complementary protocols. My hat is off to Dr. Sterns!

In the future, holistic clients will become part of integrative health care systems like the Sterns Center, which will endorse:

- Communication between all health care practitioners, medical and complementary.
- Respect for all practices, including understanding the value of alternative therapies.
- Cooperation in a partnership model that puts clients first.

As we look into the future of our health care system we can predict, without question, that more centers will emerge that are dedicated to a complementary and integrative approach to wellness and healing. It is not an either/or decision--it is about our rights and our choices to quality health care. Vote choice!

May the long time sun shine upon you.