



by Ira Gerstman, MD

## Focus on Traditional Medicine Integrated With Holistic Medicine

patients in order to restore balance. Proper nutrition is also a centerpiece.

Allopathic medicine is primarily centered on diagnosis of an illness followed by treatment, usually with medication. Fortunately, there has been a more recent evolution in medical practice toward prevention. So much of prevention is quite simply that which we already know: proper nutrition, adequate exercise, and moderation. Nutrition is the cornerstone of our well-being. Two areas piqued my interest in IHM. The first is nutritional deficiencies led by vitamin D. The second is the world of gastrointestinal microflora, the hidden organ within.

### Vitamin D deficiency

The recent explosion in interest in Vitamin D occurred approximately ten years after the holistic practitioners began to emphasize its importance. Vitamin D is fascinating, especially since it is not a vitamin. Vitamins are essential nutrients that the body cannot manufacture and must be ingested through our diets. Vitamin D is manufactured in our skin during sun exposure. It actually functions as a hormone by not only affecting calcium utilization and bone health, but also the immune, GI, muscular, nervous, respiratory, and circulatory systems.

Vitamin D deficiency is so prevalent that in my practice in Fort Washington, 50 percent of all my patients were deficient on initial screening. The most surprising discovery was that 100 percent of my patients with asthma, diabetes, chronic headaches, fibromyalgia, chronic pain syndrome, chronic neurologic disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome, severe depression, severe gen-

eralized anxiety, osteoporosis, osteopenia, severe psychiatric disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, pulmonary fibrosis, and breast cancer were Vitamin D deficient. As a result of these findings, I believe that Vitamin D supplementation is especially important in our pediatric and young adult population. Somehow, prolonged deficiency impacts development of chronic illness.

A recent study in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* (August, 2009) demonstrated that women who were treated for breast cancer and then followed were found to have a 40 percent lower chance of recurrence if their blood level of Vitamin D was over 40. (In most labs the normal range is 30-100.) In that study, everything else was controlled in the two groups. I was impressed that such a simple thing should have such a huge impact on such a serious condition.

Demographic studies of people who live at the equator show that their Vitamin D levels are between 50 and 80.

Just like our normal range for cholesterol has been adjusted downward over time (from 350 to below 200), I believe the normal Vitamin D level should be adjusted upward. Vitamin D has been shown to be safe even at blood levels of 120. The toxic level is generally agreed to be 150.

### Gastrointestinal microflora

Gastrointestinal microflora (our friendly bacteria) has also received a great deal of attention lately. There are yogurt challenges on TV commercials. I consider the microflora to be its own organ. There are more bacterial cells in our GI tracts (guts) than there are cells in our bodies. Within about one week of birth, babies have nearly completed having their guts colonized by microflora. I believe there is an evolutionary significance to this fact. These microorganisms help to support digestion, absorption of nutrients, metabolism, and the immune system. While there are more than 500 species that have

been identified, we are only familiar with about 30 of them.

Probiotic supplementation (capsule or food containing friendly microflora) has been shown to be of benefit in antibiotic-associated diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease, health promotion, and prevention of some cancers (such as colon cancer). The best-studied microflora, and those that appear in many of the supplements, are: *lactobacillus* (acidophilus, GG, ramosus), *bifidobacterium*, and *saccharomyces boulardii* (actually a yeast that inhibits certain pathogens).

### Holistic provides more options

Integrative holistic medicine improves a physician's ability to provide a wider range of beneficial options to patients in their health management. These are the principles employed by the two physicians of Concierge Medical Services of FPUD.

Traditional western medicine is also referred to as *allopathic medicine*. Integrative holistic medicine (IHM) is sometimes referred to as *complementary* or *alternative medicine*. (The **National Institutes of Health** has a center that was established in 1998 called the *National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine*.)

IHM incorporates many areas that focus on the interplay between mind, body, emotion, and spirit. We at **Concierge Medical Services of Family Practice Associates of Upper Dublin** (CMS-FPUD) strongly believe that it is possible to take the best of both worlds and apply them to the benefit of patients. Since most of the readers are familiar with traditional western medicine, I will focus this article on the general approach used in integrative holistic medicine.

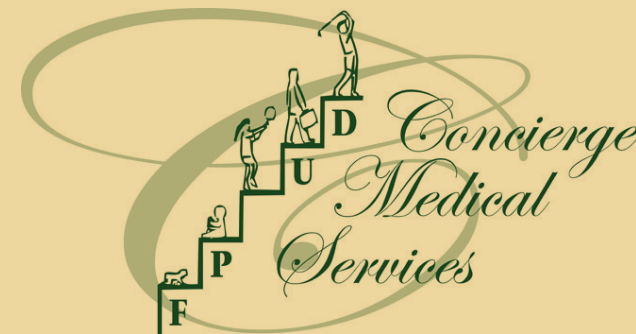
### The differences between traditional and holistic

The realm of holistic medicine incorporates a variety of areas including: functional medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy and herbal medicine, acupuncture, reflexology, traditional Chinese medicine, aryuveda (traditional Indian medicine), among others. These all look more closely at the mind/body connection when treating

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