

Integrative Medicine

the future of healthcare

by Eric Holmgren and Kimberly LaRue

There exists a deep dissatisfaction with the country's health care system today. People want more time with their health care provider. Doctors are forced to see more patients and the consequence is less time with the patient. There is an evident need for change. **Integrative Medicine** seems to bridge the gap between **Traditional Western Medicine** and total and complete well-being, as it relates to mind-body-spirit as a whole. According to the *Institute of Medicine (IOM)*, Integrative Medicine is defined as, "health care that addresses together the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of the healing process."

The Mind-Body approach teaches you how to take control of your life - how to use your own healing power to reduce stress and other negative behaviors and thoughts. This is a critical factor in maintaining or regaining health. Physical health and wellbeing is influenced by thoughts, feelings and behaviors, which can be influenced by physical symptoms. **Kimberly LaRue** states that with discipline the mind can be trained. Alternative healing, she believes, should be approached as additions, not substitutes, to traditional medicine. She says that advanced technology is useful and can diagnose things that she can't. But sometimes traditional medicine gets too technical. "I do hands-on healing, I pay attention to people," she says. "Technology has made it so that doctors don't even touch their patients anymore."

Dr. Herbert Benson, A graduate of Wesleyan University and the Harvard Medical School, is a pioneer in mind/body medicine, one of the first Western physicians to bring spirituality and healing into medicine. Within his career of over 35 years, he has defined the "Relaxation Response," the title of his first book in 1975, and continues to lead teaching and research into its efficacy in counteracting the harmful effects of stress. His work serves as a bridge between medicine and religion, East and West, mind and body, and belief and science.

Our Immune system is connected to our stress response. Many doctors are coming to the conclusion that stress is the number one contributing factor in dis-ease. One statistic states that 60-90% of visits to a physician are stress-related. If we can learn how to minimize stress in our lives, we can reduce the occurrence of dis-ease. People want to reduce stress in their lives, and many are successful, using effective tools found in integrative medicine.

The Integrative medical field umbrellas countless types of treatments and therapies. More popular are the mainstream "integrative, or alternative," therapies and treatments of today, such as: acupuncture, energy healing, deep-tissue Massage, CranioSacral Therapy (CST), aromatherapy, yoga, meditation and stretch therapy.

ShadeTree Yoga and Wellness is a good example of a company who offers integrative therapies that complement and integrate with the traditional Western approach of Medicine. They contract with other agencies what they have expertise in: Massage Therapy, CranioSacral Therapy (CST), Active Isolated Stretching (AIS), Fitness Education, Meditation, Energy Medicine, Oncology Care and Support, and other self-care modalities. Some of these agencies include medical facilities such as Palm Beach Weight and Wellness (PBWW) and the Sari Asher Center for Integrative Cancer Care, both located in West Palm Beach. The Sari Center, specializing in cancer care, and PBWW, specializing in weight-loss and whole wellness, are two great examples of incorporating integrative medicine with traditional Western medicine. They are both medical offices, offer similar services to Shade Tree Yoga, and include Acupuncture and Reflexology.

CST is an overall safe, non-invasive preventative treatment for optimal health and wellbeing. It is used to improve symptoms related to surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. CST can also reduce symptoms related to anxiety, stress, PTSD, grief and many other emotional components. **For example**, Kimberly treated a patient - a radiation oncologist - who had recurring brain cancer and was treated with surgery and chemo. The CST helped with relieving her stress, anxiety and traumatic effects of her surgery and traditional treatment. Her energy also increased dramatically and this physician is now integrating CranioSacral Therapy into her Oncology practice.

AIS is a scientifically proven flexibility method that works with the body to create and maintain balance. By using repetitive short stretches, it improves the circulation of oxygen-rich blood into the muscle tissue and flushes out damaging toxins such as lactic acid. AIS also helps the body to function efficiently by increasing Range of Motion (ROM) of the joint and neuromuscular re-education. It has been “integrated” into the practices of Doctors, Massage Therapists, Physical Therapists, Chiropractors, Personal Trainers, Athletes and everyone interested in improving their body's potential to heal itself. **One successful case of note:** a chiropractor was involved in a car accident and suffered from a fractured vertebrae, torn hamstring, and chronic low back, hip and posterior pain. This caused his flexibility to be very limited. He saw Eric for AIS therapy and after five sessions, he is pain-free and can touch his toes without feeling his hamstring injury. Without considering the combined mental, emotional, and physical aspects of his treatment, traditional medicine might have prescribed weeks of pain medications and the possibility of repair by surgery alone.

Meditation has been proven to help reduce pain and the psycho-physical effects of stress on your eco-system. It helps you to connect to your own true nature and gain insight, self-realization and wisdom. Jon Kabat-Zinn says that meditation is “an act of love, an inward gesture of benevolence and kindness toward ourselves and toward others, a gesture of the heart that recognizes our perfection even in our obvious imperfection, with all our shortcomings, our wounds, our attachments, our vexations, and our persistent habits of unawareness.”

Massage Therapy can be considered an integrative therapy. Circulation of oxygen-rich blood is increased, facilitating healing. hormones are released, stimulating relaxation or boosting energy. Traditional medicine and health insurance companies have embraced massage as a viable medical treatment. ShadeTree Yoga has chaired the Palm Beaches Marathon Festival massage committee since its' inception, six years ago. This year, on December 6, there were well over 4000 runners participating in the half and full marathon in downtown west palm beach. The weather was cool and pleasant for a race, and we did not see many heat-related injuries, but frequently runners would come to us complaining of painful cramping and showing signs of mild hypothermia and exhaustion due to dehydration. We would send the severe cases next door to the medical tent for more advanced care. Kimberly and I were consistently being summoned to the medical unit to relieve someone's severe cramping, increase their body temperature with massage or just help them feel comfortable. Ever since the first committee planning meeting of the very first race, back in 2004, the entire race organizing committee has integrated the massage therapists into the primary team of medical and wellness providers.

Marie is a cancer patient at a local west palm beach hospital. Kim visits her in her hospital room during her blood transfusion and performs CST therapy and uses other energy medicine techniques to help boost her energy and facilitate a stronger immune system while dealing with her disease. When Kimberly asked Marie how integrative healing helps her, she responded, *“It makes me feel calm and relaxed. Generally, I feel broken up and this makes me feel whole and gives me strength and energy... (Integrative Medicine) is the best thing. It's better than (traditional) medicine. It's something that's really kept me going for all these months, and I'm really glad that I found it, and Kim is just wonderful.”*

Shade Tree Yoga organizes an annual yoga retreat to Bali, Indonesia, in the summer. During the planning of last year's retreat, a dear friend, **Pema**, was the first to register with us. We were happy to see her excited about her upcoming adventure. One day, a month before the retreat, Pema told us that she had a lump on her leg and her doctor said not to fly anywhere; that she should stay home. The retreat happened without Pema and upon returning, we found out Pema had cancer, then stroked. She never regained full cognition during her treatments. Before her death, Kimberly and I visited her and with a lovingkindness presence, we offered healing and a sense of well-being, It was clear that we supported her and her family through this difficult time. Her last breath was 15 minutes after we left her that day.

The simple act of caring helps when administering or receiving healing. Compassionate awareness creates a healing atmosphere, conducive to peace and wellbeing. Kimberly and I went to **Bali** in 2007 for our honeymoon. We love the people there. Their smiles are genuine. They bow in respect every time they see you. The healing energy of the island is strong. In fact, the town where we stay, Ubud, is derived from a word that means, “medicine.” Compassionate awareness is a powerful tool and is available to us always, wherever we are. We need to begin to empower ourselves with more education on self-care. Empowerment happens when you are aware. With power comes responsibility, and with responsibility comes self-respect. People want to be whole and empowered.

The future of health care is unclear in this moment. However, we are creating a healing revolution. When we heal ourselves, we heal the world, and when we heal the world, we heal ourselves. There are hospitals integrating right now, clinics integrating, sports teams, schools, corporations... all integrating as we speak. It is coming around, slowly, but surely. The future is happening now, it just needs to spread.

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