

# HEALTH CORNER

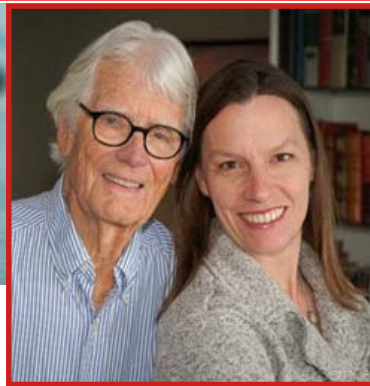


## HOW TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

By David Zitner and Dominic Covvey  
Troy Media Contributors  
Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston's recent election campaign emphasized health services, including mental health. Now, federal leaders are also dedicating substantial energy during their election campaigns to discussions of health and mental health. Mistaken beliefs and our incomplete understanding of the nature of mental health problems lead to undue, often inappropriate, reliance on doctors and overuse of psychotropic medication. The belief that all mental health problems are medical contributes to the failure of successive federal and provincial governments to support timely, useful and cost-worthy mental health services. The elements of mental health are thoughts – including attitudes – feelings and behaviour. The purposes of the many non-pharmaceutical and pharmaceutical mental health interventions are to help change the way people think, feel and behave. Many people, including mental health professionals and political leaders, don't recognize the five categories that include everyone labelled with mental health problems: People with easily discoverable medical (biological) causes for mental health problems  
Examples include those suffering from the fatigue and depression caused by an underactive thyroid gland or the overactivity and irritability caused by an overactive thyroid gland.  
People who hallucinate or have psychotic thinking from brain tumours also have easily diagnosable medical problems.  
People with obscure or difficult-to-discover medical (biological) causes for their problems  
This group includes patients with porphyria or Addison's disease, and many other rare diseases. Sometimes it takes years to find the biological abnormality.  
Many people endure additional and unnecessary suffering when treated by psychoactive medications that make their medical condition worse or when the diagnosis is delayed because doctors believe the person's problems are explained by a psychiatric label.  
People whose doctors are satisfied with hypothetical or speculated abnormal biology as an explanation  
Despite thorough and complete physical examination and testing, these doctors do not find any objective evidence of abnormal biology. There might be an illness but it's not discoverable with any objective tests because researchers have not yet identified it.  
Unfortunately for these

patients, doctors sometimes baselessly speculate or conclude that there's abnormal biology, telling patients they have a "biochemical imbalance."  
When doctors know the exact biological cause of a problem, they tell the patient and treat that cause. For example, when thyroid hormone is high or low, doctors explain the extent of the abnormality and show objective lab results. Treating a hypothetical, unspecified biochemical imbalance means the clinician has no way of knowing if the proposed medication will reduce the imbalance or make the problem worse. People with hypothetical biological illnesses are often unnecessarily medicated because many doctors (and patients) accept 'diagnosis by description.'  
Telling people who feel sad and lack energy that they have depression is just using different words to describe the problem. The descriptive label doesn't reveal the cause or what the treatment should be. People who don't have abnormal biology but who react in a normal way to their life circumstance  
Abnormal biology didn't cause the twisted behaviour of the children in Charles Dickens's book *Oliver Twist*. Nor are the sadness, anger, anxiety and rage many feel when they hear about tragedies like that unfolding in Afghanistan.  
People who receive unnecessary mental health attention but are happy with themselves, satisfied with their lives and just a little bit different  
Certain teachers value exuberant and curious children, while other teachers regard the same behaviour as evidence of hyperactivity attention deficit disorder (so-called ADHD).  
Some creative and productive philosophers and scientists may seem odd only because they're unable to communicate their profound thoughts to the rest of us.  
A cost-worthy and effective approach to mental health problems  
People with medical problems causing mental health disturbances should receive treatment for their medical condition, usually by their family doctor, with or without help from specialized advisers including endocrinologists.  
For mental health problems not the result of biological disease, doctors, armed with the power of the prescription pad, shouldn't be the first choice.  
For example, the Strongest Families Institute, a now international Nova Scotia initiative, "provides cost-effective solutions to the barriers often associated with receiving mental health care, and has strong, successful outcomes. The organization's highly trained coaches deliver proven, skills-based programs

to families in the comfort of their own homes (by phone and Internet)."  
These coaches, who have no medical credentials, are having amazing success helping people to influence and modify the mental health of family members.  
People without medical training, including mental health workers (for example psychologists and social workers), friends, clergy and relatives, can provide significant support to people with mental problems. To do that, they learn about the context of the person's life to find potential environmental or behavioural solutions.  
For example, many people who feel tired and depressed improve with better diet, exercise and better sleep. Drugs are usually unnecessary and should be avoided as early interventions because they expose people to the risk of side effects and can deflect diagnostic efforts seeking medical causes (for example, porphyria).  
However, if non-medicinal interventions fail, referral to a physician for possible medical treatment is appropriate. Drugs like valium help most people to feel relaxed, and caffeine or amphetamines help most feel energetic, regardless of normal or abnormal biology.  
A worthwhile or harmful response to medication doesn't denote underlying biological disease. Healthy and sick people respond to these drugs in the same way. Using drugs for mental problems is like using Tylenol or Aspirin for pain or fever. The response doesn't indicate or treat underlying biological pathology.  
Mental health care will be more accessible when doctors aren't the first contact or the key holders to care. Medications when necessary, but not necessarily medication. Doctors when necessary, but not necessarily doctors. Doctors are the exclusive prescribers of medications. Other mental health professionals, and most helpful and sensitive people, though, can use all the other methods including listening and talking to people or behavioural interventions focused on achieving the desired action.  
Using medical and non-medical mental health professionals appropriately will improve access to care for all and produce improved results.



## The Doctor Game Reversing Pre-Diabetes with Glycemic Control

W. Gifford-Jones, M.D. and Diana Gifford-Jones

The most important thing readers should have learned from last week's column is that pre-diabetes is reversible. And fancy pharmaceuticals aren't to thank. Rather, it's glycemic control, achieved naturally, by managing blood sugar with the help of concentrated brown seaweed. But what's glycemic control? And what's so special about brown seaweed?

For decades, this column has advocated for a change in lifestyle as a strategy for reversing the steady societal march towards higher and higher rates of type 2 diabetes – the consequence of complacency about obesity and other risk factors. But either people aren't listening, or they are being overwhelmed by negative socioeconomic factors, such as the costs of healthy food choices, lack of time for the preparation of healthy meals, promotion of poor-quality food by manufacturers, and restrictions on access to green spaces in cities where people can get out to exercise and play sports.

Here's another thing. It's a mistake to think that only individuals struggling with obesity are at risk of diabetes. As we've written about in previous columns, it's the fat you can't see – visceral fat around internal organs – that is the greatest cause for concern. Studies show that pre-diabetes affects between 22 to 35 percent of people who would not meet the clinical definition of obesity of a body mass index over 30

If you are pre-diabetic, and despite best efforts, visceral fat around organs in the body's core is winning the battle, then pay attention to this research.

Randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled studies of pre-diabetic men and women on a standardized program of exercise and a controlled-energy diet showed remarkable results from the regular use of a natural brown seaweed native to the Canadian Maritimes. While study participants in the placebo group saw progression of pre-diabetes, those taking the seaweed supplement saw improvement, including for some, a return to normal glycemic status.

### But how does it work?

Blood sugar is controlled by a delicate mechanism. Following a meal, glucose molecules are absorbed into the bloodstream and carried to cells where they're used for energy. It is the insulin produced by the pancreas that helps glucose enter cells.

If a meal contains excessive amounts of glucose, it's stored in the liver and muscles as glycogen. Later, if blood glucose drops, another hormone glucagon, also produced by the pancreas, signals the liver to breakdown glycogen into glucose to restore blood sugar to normal levels. Mild cases of hypoglycemia cause sudden hunger, dizziness, increased agitation, drowsiness, a pounding heartbeat and sweating. If the blood sugar drops further, patients exhibit personality changes, headache, blurred vision, confusion and slurred speech. And without treatment symptoms progress to unconsciousness and convulsions.

There are over two hundred and fifty different names for sugar in our foods – including sucrose, glucose, fructose, syrup, juice, many more less familiar terms – and we eat on average 142 pounds of it a year, about 7 times the recommended amount.

With each meal of carbs and sugars, blood sugar goes up as does the production of insulin by the pancreas. Between meals, the opposite occurs – large drops in blood sugar levels responsible for unwanted cravings, mood swings and energy depletion. Today's common high carb, high sugar meals accentuate these swings, resulting in what's known as glycemic stress. Brown seaweed blocks the breakdown of ingested starch and sugars, significantly slowing down their digestion rate and reducing glycemic stress. Have a look at the research presented on our website for a more detailed explanation.

Next week, in the final part of the series, we'll offer a challenge to readers with concerns about their own potential to fall victim to diabetes.

For comments, contact-us@docgiff.com.

Follow us on Instagram @docgiff and @diana\_gifford\_jones

Sign-up at [www.docgiff.com](http://www.docgiff.com) to receive our weekly e-newsletter.

# PHARMACY

## FREE Local Delivery

**Come in and see your neighborhood Pharmacists**

**Our Services Include...**

- Compliance Packaging
- Diabetic Support
- Seasonal Flu Shots
- Easy Prescription Transfer
- Medication Review
- Medication Disposal

See other side for special offers:

**20% Senior's Discount on all OTCS & Health Products**

**All Drug Plans Accepted. We reduce the co-pay by \$2.00 for ODB eligible patients**

**FREE**

**Bayer Contour**

BLOOD GLUCOSE MONITOR & MICROLET LANCETS 100s

With the purchase of 100 Countour Test Strips for only

\$74.99

Offers cannot be combined with any other discounts

**Buy 1 get 1 FREE or 9.99 EACH**

**Preferred**

EC ASA 81 mg Daily Low Dose 150 TABLETS (BONUS Pack)

Offers cannot be combined with any other discounts

**5-1345 King St East | OSHAWA**

**CALL 905.434.5005 TODAY!**

Mon.-Fri. 9am-7pm • Sat. 10am-4pm

**Mon - Fri. 7:30am - 5:30pm \* Sat. 10am - 4pm**