

“Parkinson’s - Treating the Person, not just the disease”

The topic of “Nutritional Therapy” was very popular at the recent World Parkinson Congress. There is exciting new research into the role of non-prescription and functional strategies in early Parkinson’s, as well as the potential for assisting in better overall management of the condition. However, it can be hard to navigate which strategies are safe and even effective.

To help us learn more about this, we have invited Tara Maltman-Just, RPh ABAHP FMNM as the Clinical Keynote speaker at our annual Education Conference in April. As an award-winning Pharmacist and Integrative Medicine practitioner, Tara is recognized nationally for her innovative approach to person-centred care and well qualified to offer insight on this issue. She recently discussed her work with our Community Development Coordinator, Jennifer Schoeck.

Can you describe what you mean by “treating the person, not just the disease”?

The term patient-centred care, or person-centred care as I like to call it, is receiving a lot of buzz among healthcare professionals across the country. Let’s say I’m making it my mission to help them put it into practice.

You are not a number, you are not a disease; you are a person whose concerns count.

I believe that to successfully treat patients, we need to first respect them as people with unique physical, mental and spiritual or social needs. Every person has unique biochemical individuality as much as they have unique DNA, and their own personal health goals that should be respected as well.

How is this done?

I believe a clinician’s most valuable tool is, first, a listening ear.

In our office, we meet with patients for 1 to 2 hour long consultations at a time. The time we take to listen makes us well-primed to integrate information and uncover relationships in the body that may not have been previously identified, including managing side effects and helping treatments be more effective with the proper dosing schedule and avoiding interactions with other medications, natural health products and food.

Can you share with us how people can be impacted by this approach?

There is no doubt that a demand exists to be recognized and heard, and people want to play an important role in choosing and understanding their treatments.

Many of our patients report feeling left behind in the current healthcare system, unfortunately. They may feel rushed at routine appointments, or may be waiting months to see specialists. They may have seen many practitioners, tried multiple therapies - but never had meaningful results and end up feeling short on hope.

We highly esteem collaboration and communication among other healthcare professionals, and help patients make the most of the traditional system as well, advocating for each person to help their voice be heard.

What is Integrative Medicine?

Integrative Medicine is a specialized discipline. It is an evidence-based healthcare approach that combines *conventional* and *complementary* therapies to improve your body's balance and function, using personalized strategies based on your unique needs for physical, mental and spiritual vitality.

These interventions are focused on treating the underlying cause of the problem, not just masking the symptoms.

In this approach, the treating clinician understands the science and inter-relationships among both *conventional* and *complementary* therapies - it can be thought of as a bridge between them.

It also enables the clinician to safely provide guidance on 'natural strategies' that have evidence and understand how they can interact with or even augment prescription strategies.

What drew you to the practice of Integrative Medicine?

When I first began practicing as a Pharmacist in the community setting, I loved the opportunity to counsel patients and discuss their therapeutic regime with them in detail.

However, I found that the typical pharmacy environment made it difficult to take the time truly needed to explore these areas in depth. This is why my practice now is devoted full-time to one-on-one, personalized and comprehensive health consultations, in a clinical setting. In fact, we don't sell a single product in our practice.

An interesting observation when meeting with people more closely: I often found they would be prescribed more medication to manage side effects of original medications, and it seemed like there was a missing piece of the puzzle, which led me to complete Fellowship and Board Certification in Functional, Regenerative Medicine.

I focus closely on 'treating the cause, not just masking symptoms'.

I often describe how there can be a difference with normal test levels versus optimal test levels and sometimes optimal test levels and optimal *function* in the body.

Our approach is personalized - including prescriptions, natural health products, nutrition and/or life strategies - and designed for **each person**, considering their biochemical individuality and personal goals for optimal health.

This big picture approach, I find, helps the people we work with to achieve more satisfying or lasting results.

What should a person with Parkinson's disease know about the new research on inflammation and the gut and healthy brain?

There is a definite connection between the gut and the brain.

In fact, about 90% of our main happy neurotransmitter, serotonin, is actually found in the gut.

We've often heard about Central Nervous System (CNS) including the brain and spinal cord and their communication out to the body, but an important area that people aren't always familiar with is the Enteric Nervous System (ENS) within the gut itself.

In fact, we are finding that there may be even more communication from the ENS out to the rest of the body.

This emerging evidence is showing that strategies to support healthy gastrointestinal (GI) function can aid the immune system and brain health, while decreasing the burden of inflammation that affects the body as a whole.

Given this information, we will discuss what nutritional modifications and nutrients might be helpful in the case of Parkinson's.

We'll cover some background on safety, efficacy, dosing considerations, side effects and monitoring as even nutrients sourced from natural health products and nutrients need to be guided closely.

This will be a primary focus of the talk at the Conference, so that participants can go away with a good understanding of this fascinating area, and some new strategies to help themselves live better, healthier lives.