

What Choice Do I Have?

The world is spinning; you don't feel as though you can think. Everything is emotion and the emotion is fear.

Our modern medical (allopathic) system is passably accurate in determining which part of your body is malfunctioning. The same system is wonderfully creative in treating the symptoms of the malfunction with drugs and even has additional drugs to treat symptoms (side effects) of taking the first drugs, but outside of trauma medicine that is pretty much where their talent ends. Clinicians in our modern systems have almost no talent for delivering bad news and about the same inclinations for discussing underlying causes. Additionally physicians rarely attempt to deal with the impact of bad news or help the patient process the information. Doctors and clinicians in our modern world rely almost entirely on their credentials and the god like authority we grant them. A position of authority cultivated from our earliest years when our mother's gave over or shared their position of trusted caretaker with the local physician who poked, prodded and dispensed potions to cure our ailments.

It makes little difference what the diagnosis is, cancer, chronic heart disease, diabetes or one of the many auto-immune diseases that are epidemic in our society. The medical doctor or specialist is going to tell you that there are one or two

options for treating your condition and they have the best toolbox for curing or managing your condition. The sad truth is the clinical person delivering the news probably believes what they are telling you, but there are other approaches and options with a long history restoring health and doing a better job of respecting the patient. Since the mid-1800's the AMA (American Medical Association) has been working diligently and relentlessly to own the marketplace when it comes to healthcare, but the fact is they fundamentally treat symptoms and not the underlying cause(s) of what ails you.

The alternative healthcare market place is populated by many healthcare professionals who will approach treating you with tools and methods from a variety of schools of thought, and almost all of them are more likely to treat you as a whole person and consider your beliefs, lifestyle and habits more than are the mainstream physicians. All doctors know that most ailments that affect the human body will cure themselves in seven to ten days if you give yourself rest, fluids, and proper nutrition. And please don't think anyone is suggesting that life-threatening or chronic conditions can be cured with bed rest, but many chronic or life-threatening conditions can be mitigated with similar care and life-style changes. We just need to give ourselves the space and time to let the body do its work. When it comes to many life threatening and chronic conditions alternative

medicine can help you create the conditions in your body to heal quicker and better with less chemicals and a better quality of life.

Almost every community throughout the United States has alternative healthcare providers, sometimes called holistic, naturopathic or functional medicine, and they come offering a number of different treatment modalities. The primary difference being they treat the whole person and not the just the symptoms. Modern clinical or mainstream (allopathic) medicine has made tremendous progress in treating our ailments, but they treat the human body as a broken automobile. This is fine if you have a broken arm or other trauma and even wonderful if you have a disease born of a specific pathogen that has a high mortality rate. But it breaks down when you begin to see whole populations failing because the underlying cause is epidemic to the culture. A great example would be Type 2 diabetes. I've had clinicians tell me that Type 2 diabetes is the most curable disease in the United States. One cures this disease by getting up and moving (exercise) and by eating less of the wrong foods. Modern clinical medicine knows this, but in league with the large drug companies who would rather create chemical potions to help the body live with high levels of blood sugar than to educate and encourage people to change their life styles. Another area is in heart and breathing issues. Modern medicine will treat a patient with drugs to mask the symptoms or consequences of the deficiency while the alternative

medicine practitioner will encourage the patient to change the conditions that caused the problem in the first place and might offer naturally occurring substances in the forms of teas, powders or ointments to help bridge the transition to better living situation. Don't mistake the fact that whether naturally occurring or created in a laboratory drugs are drugs and will alter the body's function, but natural remedies properly offered are unlikely to have the horrible lists of side-effects common to the products offered by the large pharmaceutical companies and are generally only intended as a temporary bridge to achieving a better underlying condition not to create a chronic dependency.

Another area of primary concern is in cancer care. Often when a person is diagnosed with cancer they are presented with menu of treatment protocols and informed that the offered protocol is the only way to treat the cancer and anything else is likely to result in death. This information is put forward before the patient-survivor has had any chance to digest the diagnosis they have just received. When questioned about alternatives, the doctor will often come back to the conversation like the closer in a car dealership hammering their view is the only course not likely to end in death. The fact is, the doctor does not want to be questioned and certainly not by someone without their knowledge of biology, chemistry and mechanical understanding of the human body. The first thing that needs to be acknowledged is when the words "You have cancer" were said, the person's brain

receiving that information immediately went into fight or flight mode and any rational thinking went out the window. I've personally spoken with several women diagnosed with cancer who flatly said they heard nothing after receiving the diagnosis and all they were thinking about was "who will raise my children?" Patients receiving a cancer diagnosis should be given time to process the information, they should be encouraged to seek a confirming second opinion and they should be encouraged to enlist an advocate. Someone willing to come to appointments, treatments and other related conversations to listen, record, and ask questions on their behalf. No one should have to listen to treatment options and protocols with a gun to their head and any uncertainty about what they are facing. It is not commonly known but there are Registered Nurses who specialize in oncology and who are available to help navigate and explain treatment options. Unfortunately the cost of these paid advocates is generally not covered by insurance. Clinicians will argue the financial burden is too great to spend that amount of time with any patient or that they may lose a patient to another doctor. That might be a possibility, but if the doctor worked to achieve trust and to build a rapport with the person, then the patient would likely return. If you're a competent and empathetic clinician the business side of things will all work out in the end regardless. The point being, any but the most compassionate and empathetic follow-up is simply wrong. In addition to a gentler more compassionate delivery of

devastating news the doctor or clinician should proceed into a discussion of the likely effectiveness of any suggested treatment for the patient's demographic, there should also be a discussion of likely side-effects for the patient's demographic and finally there should be a frank discussion of the impact on the patient's quality of life. In many cases the impact on quality of life is so serious the patient may choose not to proceed, choosing instead to enjoy the time they have left. This should be their choice. I've seen recent data that shows an increase in survivability for lung cancer from 9-11 months to 30-36 months. What the data does not show is the 20-24 months in treatment including surgery, radiation and chemotherapy with almost no increase in quality months of survivorship. If the patient-survivor had chosen to work on their underlying health and physical strength they may have achieved more, better quality of life instead of living out their time as a lab rat and conduit for insurance monies flowing to the medical community. These outcomes are unknowable, but should be in the purview of an informed patient.

We must understand there is more than an either or choice between mainstream clinical medicine and alternative holistic medicine. There is an emerging school of thought referred to as Integrative care. The integrative care model seeks to take from all available protocols and assemble a course of action best suited to the patient's healing and quality of life.

An integrative plan for treating cancer might involve a surgical intervention followed by de-stressing through mindfulness training, a nutritional plan and appropriate exercise. One thing that is often not considered is survival versus survival with a good quality of life. Frequently in cancer care the treatment is worse than the disease, a fact not often talked about. Cancer treatments can be brutal and often follow on care is prescribed because it fits the framework of best practices. Every medical specialty has its trade association that lobbies and advocates for its members, but they also establish the protocols for “best practices”, an industry euphemism for cover your butt. Best practices accomplish two things in cancer care, they assure that no patient or patient’s family can come back and say the doctor didn’t do everything possible and ensures there are very few insurance dollars left on the table. The short version is the doctor will do everything possible to treat the patient, even if it kills them or makes them so miserable they wish they were dead. Alternative medicine and the integrative treatment model seek to support and build up the patient by acknowledging and treating the mind, body and spirit of the individual. After receiving a cancer diagnosis patients should be encouraged to be part of their treatment plan creation. The more the patient is involved and believes in the course of action the more likely it is to be effective. A patient survivor who does not believe in the course of treatment is going to be a nervous wreck wasting energy worrying about a future

that has not manifested yet. Henry Ford once said something like, "...if you believe you can, or believe you can't you're likely correct." This is particularly true in the case of cancer care and treatment. Regardless, a patient who is calm and committed to a particular course of action is going to be calmer and more assured and enjoy a far superior quality of life than the patient who frets about everything and jumps from one treatment modality to another never letting anything work to its potential.

Another aspect of medical care that should be discussed is the competing interests we face in dealing with illnesses from colds and flus to serious chronic conditions. Are we trying to achieve wellness and good quality of life or are we trying to avoid the economic impact of sickness? Individuals living and working in the United States who wake on any given morning with cold or flu symptoms are encouraged to mask those symptoms with a variety of over the counter medications or to run to an Urgent-care to obtain anti-biotics so they can get to work or go to school without regard to the potential downside risks of sharing whatever "bug" they have, and without regard to the real possibility that they may be prolonging their illness and with no consideration for the disrespect we show ourselves. The manifestations of illness are our body's way of communicating with us. We should not only respect ourselves enough to listen, but give ourselves the time and rest necessary to restore our health.

Medical care in the US is a mess and the weakest voice in the arena is that of the patient. Partly this is because the patient has surrendered their place at the top of the medical food chain, but mainly it is because that place has been taken from them. The AMA has worked hard to dis-credit other healing schools of thought calling them voodoo or pseudo-science while at the same time trying to maintain the notion that what they do is practice without certain outcomes. Like having your cake and eating it too. Insurance company clerks (bureaucrats) make care delivery decisions everyday based on printed volumes of best practices with no medical training at all and no contact with the patient, a practice that is in fact practicing medicine without a license. Insurance companies purchase pharmacies and then create other bureaucratic positions called “Pharmacy Benefit Managers” who have the power to decide that the medication the doctor prescribed for the patient is too expensive and substitute another medication and to compound that insult by repeating the process several times in what is referred to as “fail first protocols”. In many states they can do this up to three times before the patient is given the medication that was originally prescribed, and it’s not uncommon for the patient to pass away while this process unwinds. Insurance companies coach doctors on how to structure their practices in a fashion that will allow them to run a successful business, but makes certain that the patient will have little or no time to have a conversation with their doctor and guarantees the patient will not have time

to digest the information given them in time to ask meaningful questions about their condition or the treatment dictated. Doctors spend years in medical schools (but only those schools approved by the AMA) learning their trade and then once in practice get most of their continuing education from the large pharmaceutical companies whose only interests is in dispensing chemical concoctions designed to create chronic users. If one takes a minute to look at healthcare in the US from a high vantage point it becomes obvious quite quickly that all the competing interests have a lot on their minds, but the least of it is in the interest of the patient.

The alternative health care community is largely the opposite side of that coin. The relationship with the patient is the most important thing, the efficacy of the treatment and the patients quality of life are of the utmost importance. Treating the whole person, mind, body and spirit, is the underlying principle and designing a protocol that the patient understands and buys into is significant part of the conversation.

If you have been diagnosed with a condition that requires medical attention and you are not comfortable with the guidance you are being given consider talking with someone from the alternative medical community. Go online and look for natural healers, functional medicine practitioners, homeopaths or traditional Chinese medicine doctors. If your problem is not something they can help they will tell you. In all cases remember you are entitled to understand what you are

dealing with, what the contributing underlying causes are and what you can do to mitigate them, what the likelihood is that the recommend treatment will be effective and the impact on your quality of life. Many life threatening conditions will be treated with a combination of western medicine and supportive treatment from the alternative community.

Finally, be aware that insurance companies will not typically cover the cost of alternative healthcare and this is something you should address with your elected government officials. Why is it that government officials, insurance bureaucrats and pharmacy employees are in positions to make decisions about how you spend your healthcare dollars, but you are not.

You may be frightened when first diagnosed with a serious condition, but you can be involved and take charge of your healthcare, if you chose to.