

Holistic Medicine: Combining the East and the West Through Diet

N. To

Collin College

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the integration of holistic medicine into the American healthcare system and how it will affect the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of healthcare delivery systems in the year 2020. The blending of western and eastern medicine will greatly impact the quality of American healthcare systems by making care more affordable, decreasing the accumulation of antibiotic-resistant pathogens, and increasing the quality of care by focusing on treating the whole body. This paper will discuss the combination of eastern and western practices and the impact holistic medicine on the people's health and diet. Throughout the years, Integrative nutrition has been making its way into western medicine, placing the patient in the center of care and providing not only treatment but delivering preventative care. Through the implementation of holistic medicine programs in universities or Integrative medicine colleges, the intermixing of eastern and western medicine may be achieved in the next few years.

Keywords: holistic medicine, integrative medicine, diet, integrative nutrition

Holistic Medicine: Combining the East and the West

Holistic medicine is the practice of not only diagnosing and treating the patient based on his or her disease, but also in healing the patient's "Qi", or energy life source. Unlike western medicine, eastern medicine focuses on healing the body as a whole rather than solely the patient's conditions (Wang, 2017). Oriental practitioners mainly use non-invasive, natural practices, such as acupuncture, herbal remedies, and mind/body exercises, in order to achieve a patient's optimal fitness, while maintaining a healthy balance in life (Mohan, 2017). As the American healthcare system advances, physicians from holistic and western medicine are finding new ways for both practices to be integrated together to provide the most effective care (Wang, 2017).

A key component to the treatment of patients in holistic medicine is diet. Diet plays a paramount role in a person's health, contributing to his or her mood, bringing in vital nutrients and antioxidants, and if consuming the right foods, preventing future conditions from appearing. It is indisputable that what a person eats makes an influential impact on his or her health. What one chooses to eat and what not to eat is a factor in whether a disease, negligible or detrimental, will occur and cause damaging effects (AT Home Health and Hospice Care, 2016). Diseases such as obesity and heart disease sprout from unhealthy eating habits and lack of essential nutrients prior to diagnosis. In the United States, approximately one-third of Americans (33.8%) are obese and about 17% of adolescents and children have obesity (CDC, 2017). With eastern medicine, this epidemic may be slowed in the long-term.

Integrative nutrition plays a substantial role in holistic medicine. Unlike western practitioners who prescribe medicine and invasive procedures, holistic medicine physicians

utilize diet and natural medicine to heal patients and improve wellness. Holistic medicine focuses on healing the body as a whole and preventative care by integrating food and supplements to promote optimal health and to help treat disease (Lund, 2013). Holistic nutrition consists of consuming natural, organic, and whole foods that are aimed to uplift the spirit, body, and mind to heal an illness or prevent chronic health conditions (Pellegrini, 2017). It encourages proper nutrition and education to patients. Integrative nutrition is essential because it provides the energy and nutrition needed to fuel the body's natural processes. Food strong in macronutrients, micronutrients, and fiber is necessary to provide the body energy to grow and regenerate muscle, fat, bone, and blood. This process fueled by holistic foods makes for a stronger, healthier body that can prevent disease in the future (Pellegrini, 2017).

Incorporating alternative nutrition into one's diet makes a vast impact on one's preventative health. A study estimated that 80% of Type 2 Diabetes can be prevented through a change in nutrition and utilization of holistic diet (Guerrere, 2017). The body's immune system and ability to protect itself from disease and harmful conditions are linked to the person's diet. A holistic diet such as leafy greens and herbs can prevent a second heart attack from occurring by 70% (Guerrere, 2017). Holistic practitioners concur that diet if followed accurately, can effectively treat a patient naturally without the use of prescription drugs or medical procedures (Pellegrini, 2017). The assortment of proteins, vitamins, and nutrients coincide to reach the optimum level of health, improve emotional well-being, and defend against diseases such as obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Those who suffer from chronic conditions can utilize integrative foods to strengthen internal organs, muscles, bones, and blood for a more effective healing process. As holistic medicine can physically heal, it can also improve psychological

wellness and enhance the mind by relieving stress and aiding with mental conditions through the consumption of nutrient and protein-rich foods.

As eastern medicine begin to assimilate into the American healthcare system, therapeutic medical foods have been making an appearance in western medicine. Medical foods are defined as a food that is prescribed and consumed under the supervision of a practitioner or a dietician for the purpose of treating a disease or a condition (Alschuler, 2011). Therapeutic medical foods are important because they can serve as an effective alternative to prescribed medication and invasive surgeries. Holistic foods can be the solution to preventing further accumulation of antibiotic-resistant pathogens and to making treatment cost-friendly to patients and the disenfranchised. Although medical foods may be used to treat acute conditions, it is widely used as long-term preventative care for advancing diseases.

As there are many benefits to alternative medicine, some people argue that there are also many downsides too. One drawback of holistic medicine is the lack of well-designed studies that prove whether these traditional practices are actually effective or not. Practices that have not undergone rigorous clinical trial and study should not be exercised for there is a chance that it is unsafe and have a few drawbacks in some cases (Lickerman, 2010). Fortunately, throughout the years more clinical trials on holistic therapies and diets have been conducted, rendering most practices safe. Although many of these practices are effective, many are still skeptical of its beneficial effects on the body. Some people argue that it can be unsafe for patients to choose CAM therapies over their primary care provider for they are not getting “proper” medical treatment (Luke, 2017). Because of this, many believe that holistic medicine practices, such as the Japanese Reiki therapy, are a waste of money and can put one’s life at risk. Physicians

oppose the fact that because holistic medicine is deemed natural, that it is assumed to be healthier and safer for the body. Doctors claim that this can be a misleading assumption for patients since some integrative medicine practices can be unbeneficial. Whether the mode of treatment is natural or man-made, the effects on the body biologically do not differ, and each could only be proven effective through medical studies (Lickerman, 2010). Another con regarding the holistic approach is that it entails a long-term treatment that allows the natural products to heal the body and therefore could not be useful in cases of emergency (Southern Spine Institute, 2017).

Physicians today are finding out more ways western and eastern medicine can effectively complement one another when healing patients and improving their well-being. With the implementation of many programs and schools dedicated to integrating holistic medicine into the new vision of healthcare, an abundance of healthcare care models for Integrative medicine are being explored (Wang, 2011). Holistic medicine over the decades has grown popular in the states; According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), the number of visits to holistic practitioners has exceeded the number of visits to primary care physicians (Wang, 2011). By 2008, the percentage of patients who utilize complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) rose to 38% and is still increasing according to NIH NCCAM (Wang, 2011). In reaction to this exponential growth, CAM as a substitute for western medicine has tripled since 2000 (Ji, 2016). This growth in conventional medicine and holistic nutrition practices will greatly contribute and improve the quality of healthcare in America. Due to its increasing demand and beneficial effects, CAM will increasingly become prevalent in American healthcare systems, working hand in hand with western medical practices. Along with holistic nutrition, Integrative medicine continues to

adhere to traditional practices of healing the body, mind, and soul through natural therapies to promote optimal health and create balance within the body.

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