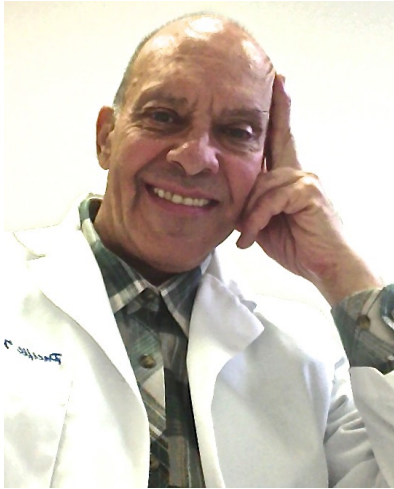


The Treatment Boundaries of Complementary Medical Care



I know I'm going to get some pushback from this column. After being in the naturopathic medical world for more than 30 years, **one of the things we've learned is that complementary practitioners often give medical advice outside of their realm of knowledge and legal boundaries.** To list some examples:

-- a patient who was told by their nutritionist that they had a thyroid condition. All lab values indicated a perfectly functioning thyroid with no clinical thyroid dysfunction symptoms.

-- a patient who visited a "medical intuitive" and were told they had liver disease, although all her signs and symptoms and lab tests were negative for any liver conditions.

-- a chiropractor who prescribed hundreds of dollars of supplements for conditions indicated by muscle testing, conditions that in reality did not exist.

Let's take a look at some complementary providers and the scope of their practices.

Nutritionist/Dietician

According to the National Association of Nutrition Professionals, "A Nutrition Professional advises individuals, families and groups on how to improve diet, lifestyle and attitude to promote optimal health." That's all.

The Association goes on to say that a nutritionist "does not practice medical nutrition, diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease, make unproven health claims, misrepresent training, use unproven devices, assessments or therapies or use network marketing or product sales in lieu of individual client education."

Chiropractic

This is a tricky one. Although chiropractic doctors enjoy a wide scope of practice that allows them to practice like naturopathic physicians or primary care providers, their training is not focused in this area. According to the International Chiropractic Association, "The science of chiropractic deals with the relationship between the articulations of the skeleton and the nervous system, and the role of this relationship in the restoration and maintenance of health. Of primary concern to chiropractic are abnormalities of structure or function of the vertebral column known clinically as the vertebral subluxation complex. The subluxation complex includes any alteration of the biomechanical and physiological dynamics of contiguous spinal structures which can cause neuronal disturbances."

Chiropractic associations have lobbied hard over the years to change their licensing laws to prove their medical legitimacy and expand their scope of practice more into the realm of

naturopathic physicians and medical doctors. The truth is that while many chiropractors have risen to the challenge, most have not. They just don't have the depth of training in biochemistry and differential diagnosis that MDs and NDs have. If in doubt, here's something to ponder: who do you trust more to diagnose a metabolic or chronic illness and come up with a treatment plan: your chiropractor or your MD or ND? Most chiropractors should stick to their main field of emphasis; this is what they do better than other professions. I use chiropractic exclusively for musculoskeletal complaints, but am open to hearing what my chiropractor may have to say about anything else he may find.

Acupuncture/Oriental Medicine

Acupuncture is a medical system complete and within itself with little relation to the more familiar western (conventional, naturopathic, chiropractic) systems. "Deficient kidney chi" does not mean that anything is wrong with a person's kidneys. But there is a hazy grey area of Oriental medical diagnosis and treatment that has spilled over into Western medical diagnosis that I don't really understand very well.

The World Health Organization has said that acupuncture has been proven effective in high and low blood pressure, chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, some gastric conditions, including peptic ulcer, painful periods, dysentery, allergic rhinitis, facial pain, morning sickness, rheumatoid arthritis, sprains, tennis elbow, sciatica, dental pain, reducing the risk of stroke and inducing labor. Other conditions for which the WHO say that acupuncture may help but more evidence is needed fibromyalgia, neuralgia, post-operative convalescence, substance abuse, vascular dementia, pertussis and a number of infections.

Personally, I absolutely love acupuncture, have had many treatments over the years and strongly recommend it as an adjunct to the work we do at Pacific Naturopathic.

Ayurveda

Frankly, I know very little about Ayurvedic medicine. Like Oriental medicine, Ayurveda is a medical system complete within itself. Ayurveda's basic principal is that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, and spirit. Its main goal is to promote good health, not fight disease. Ayurvedic medicine is based on the concept that health and wellness depend on a delicate balance between the mind, body, and spirit. I love this approach.

It is obvious that Ayurveda has much to offer as an adjunct to Western medicine. Ayurvedic practices like internal cleansing, diet, yoga, massage and meditation have proven health benefits. Herbs used in Ayurvedic medicine turmeric, ginger and neem have been well-studied for their health-promoting qualities.

Ayurveda is not licensed in any state that I know of and is most often practiced by lay persons or health providers licensed in another field. Ayurveda can have positive effects when used as

a complementary therapy in combination with conventional or naturopathic medical care. Make sure to research the training and credentials of any Ayurvedic practitioner.