



**INTEGRATED MEDICINE:**  
*the Total Approach to Wellness*

by Seema Patel, MD

Integrated Medicine (IM) describes a new philosophy in which nutrition, exercise, nutraceuticals, and other healthy lifestyle practices can help you to not only survive but also thrive. The ultimate goal is to keep clients mentally sharp, physically fit and disease resistant. Hungry for information, a significant percentage of our population is consulting alternative therapy practitioners, subscribing to health newsletters, visiting book and health food stores, and surfing the Web in record numbers.

Traditional medical professions must learn to examine all options that have the potential to diminish human suffering. Who can best team up with individuals in their quest to take charge of their own health and well-being? Once empowered with the knowledge of a wide variety of healing methods, physicians and their patients can become true partners in healing with a common goal- to give and receive the best possible care.

For the past decade or so, it has become obvious that a new approach to health care is needed. We no longer have to cling to the mechanistic, fix-me mentality traditionally advocated in health care. We now have the capacity to reverse the ever-increasing incidence for chronic disease, combat premature aging, and improve quality of life by treating total individuals rather than treating only the diseases. The term IM denotes a philosophy of dealing with the person as a whole and views illness as a disruption of physical and mental well-being. As clients (the word client replaces the less empowering patient) learn to adopt healthy lifestyle choices to stimulate the body's natural self-healing and self-regulating abilities.

**The term IM denotes integration of:**

- 1) the body, emotions, mind, and spirit to enhance wellness and longevity.
- 2) the best of conventional and alternative medicine.

IM will merge the best of traditional spa therapies with the latest integrative medical practices. We do not suggest abandoning Western medicine completely, but rather that you seek out spa medicine with its wellness and longevity focus, and use Western medicine where it is at its best as a therapeutic temporizing measure in established disease. We know that the treatment of chronic disease by medications rarely functions to eliminate the instigating process, only to arrest the resultant symptoms. Over the next several years, the centers for health education, counseling, alternative methodologies, and other health strategies will move outside of the traditional confines of HMO's and hospitals. Our cost constricted health care system is unable to redistribute resources in the fashion necessary to meet the increasing demand of the baby boomer generation for IM.

A prime example of the evolution in thinking and the various approaches to management of disease is provided by the recent acknowledgement that inflammation plays a major role in the development of chronic disease. Until recently, traditional medicine has focused on the tight control of various laboratory markers such as cholesterol as an important measure in the prevention of chronic disease. The cover story in Time magazine February 23, 2004 suggested that instead of different treatments for heart disease, Alzheimer's, and colon cancer, there might be a single inflammation-reducing remedy that would prevent all three.

This introduced to the general public the novel concept that



the inflammatory process may be the most important factor underlying the development of chronic disease in various areas of the body. Traditional medicine rushed to respond by suggesting that better laboratory markers of inflammation should be used to identify this problem followed by the use of medications. Conversely, proponents of IM responded with a call for alteration of lifestyle habits, diet, nutrition and supplementation. It was felt that the chronic and continuous low-level demand that silent inflammation places on the body causes a breakdown in the immune system. As a result, various diets recommending the balanced intake of macronutrients (protein, fats and carbohydrates) were widely promoted. These diets were felt to work by achieving insulin control by balancing the intake of protein and carbohydrates. An imbalance of too many carbohydrates, proteins and refined sugar may advance the release of inflammatory mediators. This newly verified fact demonstrates the opposite management strategies promoted by traditional medical practitioners and proponents of an integrated alternative approach. It is the same revelation, just a different response. One focuses on preventing the root cause and the other focuses on identifying and medicating.

This is one example of the way that IM may change the landscape of medicine. If we can move towards education and prevention, this may diminish many of the current dilemmas of health care such as increasing health care costs and access to treatment. Of course these changes have developed over many years with a rapidly evolving society which now demands fast food and microwavable dinner entrees coupled with little exercise time. The changes will occur, but only with time and a dedicated, committed effort by the front line forces of traditional medicine to spread the word of prevention.



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