

# Holistic Medicine in the Free Clinic

**Note-**The below notes were written for a talk I on gave at the National Association of Free Clinics. While I have altered them before posting, I left in some of my personal information, for those newer to giving presentations on what someone else may include on the personal side of things. Personalize this at your leisure.

## Goals and Concepts

1. Goals
  - Convince folks why they may want holistic medicine at free clinics
  - Integration of holistic medicine with conventional medicine
  - Usefulness of herbal medicine
  - Defining terms; holistic and conventional medicine
  - Answer questions about providing holistic medicine at a free clinic
  - Discussion of some specific holistic treatments for some common disorders (Influenza, Ulcerative colitis, Affective disorders)
2. Discussion about herbalism, and my practice and bias as an herbalist
3. My experience working as an herbalist and Director of Holistic Medicine at a free clinic
4. How can I personally help other clinics incorporate holistic medicine (particularly herbal) into their clinics?
5. Try to help others (either here or outside of this class) figure out how to incorporate holistic medicine at their free clinics.

## Questions for the Audience

1. Who personally uses a form of holistic medicine?
2. Who practices a form of holistic medicine?
  - ▶ Professionally
  - ▶ Personally
3. Do any of your free clinics offer holistic medicine?
  - ▶ What type?
4. Questions-this is an involved topic, please let me know any questions as we go along.
5. Rules-gentleman's disagreements please.

## Introduction into Herbal Medicine and Treatments

1. Brief introduction of the Ithaca Free Clinic
  - Political as well as medical orientation
  - Ithaca Health Alliance, our umbrella organization. An alternative to standard insurance policies, keeping resources local

- Because of our political leanings and run-ins, we are not always supported by local medical institutions nor do we have tax-exempt status. This has led to occasional tensions among the organizations involved.
  - Not always supported by doctors due to our use of holistic medicine
2. Introduction to myself and what I do at the clinic and personally
- ♦ Important as I know only some of the aspects at working at or for the free clinic.
  - ♦ A personal bias in this presentation as a Western Clinical herbalist and view medicine through this lens.
  - ♦ Western clinical herbalist-what is this?
  - ♦ Important-How I like working with and learning from doctors
    - a) Whom I am at the clinic
      - ▶ A practitioner-Herbalist
      - ▶ Team member-steering committee, early member of helping start the clinic
      - ▶ Coordinator for holistic medicine
    - b) Whom I am not at the clinic
      - ▶ Work with legal issues
      - ▶ Interface with hospitals and most outside agencies
      - ▶ Grant writer, etc.

### **Holistic Medicine-Definitions**

- 1) Other terms
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Alternative</li> <li>♦ CAM</li> <li>♦ Complimentary</li> <li>♦ Holistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Integrative</li> <li>♦ Non-conventional</li> <li>♦ Quack (snake-oil, etc.)</li> </ul>
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  - There is no one real defining term for holistic practitioners since they are often quite varied from each other-from chiropractor to energy work.
  - I tend towards a more pathophysiological view with constitutional overlays
  - This leans more towards 'modern medicine' than the energetics that some holistic practitioners employ.
  - Constitutional medicine; looking to help the whole person rather than just individual parts
  - Though we treat symptoms too.
- 2) What all these disparate 'holistic' modalities have in common; they are not 'conventional', not modern medicine in treatment or practice.
  - 3) Terms such as CAM, complimentary and integrative infer holistic medicine's place is in association with modern medical practice. Holistic medicine often stands-alone as medicine and treatment.
  - 4) Holistic is a way of approaching health care, not necessarily the treatment.

- 5) Nurses are often the holistic guardians of hospitals.
- 6) A doctor could be holistic in her or his approach, and a holistic practitioner could be allopathic (symptom treating only) in theirs.

- **Conventional medicine**

- 1) University-trained professional (doctor, nurse, nurse practitioner, etc)
  - 2) Terms
 

♦ Allopathic	♦ Orthodox
♦ Conventional,	♦ Standard (practice)
♦ Modern	♦ Traditional
♦ 'Medicine'	
- Some holistic practices to incorporate at a free clinic
 

♦ Herbalism	♦ Massage
♦ Acupuncture	♦ Nutrition/Diet
♦ Chiropractor	♦ Reiki and Energy work
  - What holistic medicine is not-all below are conditional
    - ▶ A panacea- a cure for all that doctors cannot cure
    - ▶ Inexpensive
    - ▶ Short-term
    - ▶ What the media promises
    - ▶ What the media demonizes

### **Incorporation of Holistic Medicine at Free Clinics**

- Incorporation of holistic practitioners may involve any of the below. Many of these are goals that we are far from implemented at the IFC. In other words, this is my fantasy of what a truly integrated clinic would look/act like.
  1. Having one or more healing disciplines at the free clinic (or referring out for them)
  2. Discussion amongst the different practitioners about individual patients
  3. Setting up protocols for the clinic on how to go about integrating medicine and treatment at the clinic
  4. Respect is key in this model
  5. Respect for the patients needs and wants
  6. Respect of the practitioners of each others practices
  7. Each practitioner must be competent within their individual practice
  8. Weighing all options for the patients health, given a practitioners' experience and skills
    - Both conventional and holistic practitioners should reach out and ask each other for help, suggestions and advice.
    - Learning from each other at the clinic.

- Setting up time for the different clinic practitioners to discuss their modality and any special focus they may have, as well places they feel less confident and would like to work with others.
- It would be beneficial for practitioners to unobtrusively sit in and listen to each other during patient intake and treatment, to get a sense of each others practice
- Patient orientation, looking for the best treatment for the patients
- Everyone does not have to know how to do the others practice. A doctor does not have to know herbal medicine, and the converse
- This is the beauty of an integrative clinic, where each practitioner only need know about which each practice has to offer, so they can refer clients, either to incorporate aspects of each others medicines or for alternative diagnosis.

## **Why have Holistic Medicine and Treatments at a Free Clinic**

1. Because it is good for patients
2. Many patients want to employ holistic therapies
3. Since few insurance policies cover holistic treatments, we need to be available to all, even if they have some form of coverage
4. It offers patients more treatment options
5. It offers doctors, nurses and other clinicians more treatment options
6. It treats many problems conventional medicine may not address (see below)
7. Frees up doctors time
8. Holistic medicine often emphasizes self-care
9. Self-care offers patients long-term health care (and again frees up doctor's time)
10. Self care can significantly reduce health costs
11. Holistic practitioners often have more time per appointment to explain details to patients, helping to clarify their individual situation
12. Having holistic medicine at the clinic offers patients a better understanding of the differing modalities. This is important because
  - Much of the information that reaches patients is based on a consumer-driven orientation. This information is usually biased towards selling a product rather than helping them make informed decisions (similar to conventional drug advertisements)
  - Since most alterative medicines are not tightly regulated, information can make ludicrous and grandiose claims
  - Patients often seek holistic treatments as a last recourse. This can mean that as they grasp for straws, they are more easily swayed by larger-than-life claims.

## **Education and Outreach**

- **Integrating holistic medicine with the free clinic and staff**
  - ▶ Help educate staff and patients about the forms of holistic medicine offered

- ▶ Have a meeting amongst all staff, be prepared to discuss your practice in both general and personal tones
- ▶ When the opportunity presents itself, let the front desk and other non-medical staff know what you do. These are often the people who will suggest holistic medicine options at the clinic, and the more they know and the more comfortable they are with it, the more likely they will refer patients
- ▶ Intake nurses are also important folks to know what you do, as they too direct patients to different practitioners
- ▶ If your practice is not busy, let intake people know that you have room for patients if the doctors are booked up or if the patient has to leave early
- ▶ Just be yourself at the clinic, let other practitioners see your commitment to free clinics
- ▶ Don't push your modality, but when the opportunity presents itself, let others know how you practice
- ▶ When discussing your modality, don't try to sell it, if you believe in it, it should be seen by the others around you
- ▶ Be ready to answer some hard questions
- ▶ Even if no one questions your practice, let others know whom you are, what you do, and what you can offer other practitioners and patients
- **The Waiting Room**-a good place to let patients know about holistic medicine
  - ♦ Introduce yourself and what you do (I usually add some humor here, waiting rooms are not much fun)
  - ♦ Offering stuff-surplus medicines, cough drops, timely advice, (I've brought in organic apples from my garden)
  - ♦ Put up wall charts and handouts discussing the merits of holistic practice.
- **Community Outreach**-letting others know that holistic health services are available at the free clinic
  - ♦ Put up flyers in co-ops, health food stores, and less obvious spots
  - ♦ Word of mouth, bring it into conversations, don't be bashful, it is a community service

## Conventional Medicine

### Advantages

- 1) Commonly understood-at least not seen as new or different. It has a familiarity
- 2) Medicines can be commonly obtained, both OTC and prescription
- 3) Information can easily be found on these. Some of the sources are reasonably reliable, unbiased in instructions and side effects, as on some internet sites
- 4) Standardized. This may be one of the main advantages, each dose (pill, capsule, etc) will reliably be what the package says with no variation of the ingredients (at least in the US)
- 5) In general viewed more favorably in the media (this may be changing)
- 6) Easy instructions and form. Usually a pill or capsule that may be taken once a day
- 7) Lab and other tests can be very helpful in determining causes of illnesses.

8) Medicines are reasonably flavorless

### **Disadvantages**

- 1) May be very expensive
- 2) The need, time and money, to obtain a prescription.
- 3) Many uncomfortable and potentially dangerous side effects associated with some common drugs
- 4) The detailed lists of side effects on bottles and inserts can be confusing to patients.
- 5) The whole systemized method of modern medicine; from visit, to drugs to hospitals, is impossibly costly to many
- 6) In general most doctors have very little time per individual patient. This frustrates many patients to not be heard, and leaves many doctors in the dark about potential other problems or causative factors that more time would have helped flush out
- 7) Limited in tonic treatments, medicines generally not nourishing.
- 8) Over-reliance on lab tests, raising costs.
- 9) The difficulties of doctors and prescribing narcotics and other controlled substances may be alleviated by suggesting herbal anodynes or other pain – relieving treatments
- 10) Many folks have a reflex dislike of conventional medicine

### **Holistic Medicine**

#### **Advantages**

- 1) Holistic medicines often help with long-term health conditions. They look to tonify (build, nourish) so in the long run the person is less reliant on herbs or drugs. A better working person.
- 2) This is different than the usual approach of conventional medicine which is generally geared towards symptom treating, while helpful for the short term, may do little to address the problem long-term
- 3) Holistic medicines and practices are often gentler than their conventional counterparts for such common problems such as stress, anxiety, and insomnia. While they may not be as strong, they are often helpful and taken over time have long-term healthful effects.
- 4) Other places that herbal and other holistic medicines and practices perform well are with digestive ailments, chronic and other fatigue syndromes, after-effects of Lyme and other lingering chronic ailments
- 5) Holistic medicine can often improve quality of life even if not curative
- 6) Patients may appreciate the more extensive interview process—having questions asked that they may not have thought about previously
- 7) Treatment often involves looking at disparate symptoms and discerning a pattern. This looks to see if one underlying problem (either endogenous or exogenous) is the root of the problem and to treat it.
- 8) Affordability

- Making one's own medicine
- No prescription needed (save money on doctors visit)
- Often less expensive on an individual basis (but may be more in the long run)
- The preparation itself may be soothing. Such as with a tea or syrup

### **Disadvantages**

- 1) May not be taken seriously
- 2) A lot of new terminology and ideas which may be confusing for the patient.
- 3) Generally not covered by insurance policies
- 4) Legal issues
- 5) Record keeping (especially electronic records) are not set up for holistic practitioners
- 6) Within the confines of the free clinic, other practitioners may leave less rooms for doctors to work in
- 7) There is more complexity for the staff to work with if unfamiliar
- 8) Treatments and interview process may be unfamiliar and make the patient uncomfortable (especially probing questions)
- 9) Medicines
  - Expensive if needed for a long-period (which is often)
  - Insurance-not covered
  - Directions can be difficult, as with making a tea
  - Medicines may be hard to find
  - Patients often unfamiliar or uncomfortable adjusting their own dosages
  - Medicine (especially tea) needs equipment, such as hot water and a french tea press
  - Patient compliance for the special ways they may need to take their medicines, taking throughout the day
  - May be a bit embarrassed to take the medicines in front of others
  - Younger students cannot take their medicines to school
  - Flavor-many strong-tasting medicines

### **Finding, choosing and providing for holistic practitioners.**

- Legalities, responsibilities, evaluation of practitioners, services and treatments.
  - Donations and acquiring supplies for holistic practitioners
1. How to evaluate holistic practitioners, especially without any formal degree or license
    - 1) Personal interview
    - 2) References
    - 3) Ask around the community
  2. How to choose different holistic modalities to compliment the clinic and its clientele
    - 1) Check your own personal prejudices about different modalities that you may disagree with. It is about the patients

- 2) If it is an unfamiliar modality, network with other practitioners to learn more about it
- 3) Even within a specific modality there is a lot of differences between individual practitioners, ask about specific ways they practice
3. About finding and holding onto volunteers, holistic practitioners can be hard to retain for the opposite reasons of many doctors. That is MDs often have busy practices and little time to help out. Holistic practitioners often have to drum up business and so have less time available to volunteer.
4. Acquiring donations for the holistic staff.
5. What supplies are needed
6. Whom should supply what

### **Regulatory Issues**

- Herbalists in particular are not licensed. How might this affect your clinic?
- Most other forms of practitioners (except energy workers) have some form of licensure, will they need to bring it in to verify?
- What about practitioners whom are of a licensed discipline but themselves are not licensed and they are clearly competent?

### **Final Segment of Class**

1. Some disorders that may be better served by holistic medicine
2. Summation of ideas
3. Participation time of those attending this presentation to discuss individual issues and ideas about holistic medicine at their free clinic
4. Questions, answer and discussion

### **Differences between Conventional and Alternative Health Care**

1. Use Case Studies
  - Hiccoughs
  - Dairy allergies vs. flu
  - Hepatitis C-toning the whole person
  - Skin rashes brought about by food allergies
  - Continually getting 'sick'
  - Chronic Lyme

#### **1) Treatment-Conventional Generalizations**

- People seek treatment after symptomatic when they are ill
- Less emphasis on prevention (including diet, exercise)
- Symptom oriented
- Looking for causative agent (otherwise a syndrome) whether it is a virus, bacterial, biochemical imbalance, cancer. Trying to identify the agent causing the distress
- Medicines are generally well-researched (even if tainted by money)
- Medicines are standardized

- May be very specific, as to a type of virus or bacteria
- Stronger medicines
- Undesirable side effects common
- Expensive-though may be covered by insurance (which is also expensive)
  - ♦ Doctor or hospital visit
  - ♦ Lab tests
  - ♦ Drugs
  - ♦ Follow up on any of the above
- Prescription often needed (possibly entailing a doctors visit)
- Lab tests are often the main diagnostic tools
- Drugs, radiation and surgery are three main tools for treating illness.
- Due to our medical system, out of fear of being sued doctors may order an extraordinary amount of lab tests
- Results form treatment are often expected to take effect soon
- Conventional drugs are often easier to take, in an easy to consume form

## 2) Treatment-Holistic Generalizations

- People may seek treatment for health maintenance rather than when just ill
- More emphasis on prevention and health maintenance
- Practitioners more education-oriented
- Medicines may vary in quality, standardization, potency, etc.
- Many aspects (holistic approach) of a person's life and health are explored to look for imbalances, in order to balance them.
- Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects are considered.
- All of these aspects are considered and looked at to try to correct imbalance
- Treatment results often take a while to set in
- Herbal medicines come in a wide variety of forms, some easier to ingest than others. And some have to be prepared which can be time consuming and difficult when ill.
- Prescriptions not needed
- May be hard to find the herb that was recommended to you
- While not individually expensive, if needed over a period of time or a high dosage, they are expensive
- Herbalists and herbal medicines are not covered by any insurance policies

## Influenza or the common cold

- **Conventional medicine**
  - 1) Antibiotics
  - 2) Antivirals (Tamiflu, Relenza)
  - 3) Bed rest
  - 4) Diet and fluid intake
- **Holistic medicine**
  - 1) If an uncommon event; herbal antibiotic-type remedy

- 2) If reoccurring, than maintenance herbs as well as symptom treating.
- 3) Categories; antiinflammatories, antimicrobials, diaphoretics, nervine, sedatives, anodynes
- 4) Echinacea-stimulate innate immunity
- 5) Astragalus-modulate adaptive immunity
- 6) Thyme, Ligusticum-anti-viral properties, with respiratory affinity
- 7) Diet and fluid intake
- 8) Bed rest

## Ulcerative Colitis

### Conventional medicine-Treatments and drugs

- The goal of medical treatment is to reduce the inflammation
- Anti-inflammatory drugs
  - Sulfasalazine (Azulfidine)- reduces frequency of recurrences
  - Mesalamine (Asacol, Rowasa) and olsalazine (Dipentum).
  - Balsalazide (Colazal).
  - Corticosteroids

### Immune system suppressors

- Azathioprine (Imuran) and mercaptopurine (Purinethol).
- Cyclosporine (Neoral, Sandimmune).
- Infliximab (Remicade)

### Nicotine patches

### Other medications

- Anti-diarrheals
- Laxatives
- Pain relievers
- Iron supplements

### Surgery

## Herbal Treatment

1. Look for triggers, including food intolerances, allergies, etc.
2. Constitutional approach-treating the whole person
3. Gut repair

## Categories for Ulcerative colitis

Antidiarrheal	Anxiolytic	Nervines
Antiinflammatories	Astringents	Styptic
Antiseptic	Bitters	Vulnerary
Antispasmodic	Demulcents	

## Foods and Supplements for Ulcerative colitis

- Antioxidants-free radical scavenging for cellular damage
- High quality oils and fatty acids-help with cell phospholipid membrane
- Multi-vitamins-for decreased nutritional uptake

## **Stress, Anxiety and Depression**

### **Conventional Medicine**

1. Rather than looking at individual situations and body type, usually going with the most recent proven drug (on or off label), with the least common side effects.
2. Antidepressants, including SSRI's and other mood modification drugs
3. Many of these drugs can have positive results in a relatively short time
4. Many SSRI's have been linked with suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
5. Drugs are modifiers of mood to help over a certain period of time, sometime in conjunction with counseling (though this is not often seen in practice)
6. Counseling

### **Holistic Medicine**

1. Decipher the type of affective disorder. Teasing apart differences such as anxious depression compared to vegetative depression
2. A look at body type and how nutrition, exercise or other life-style modifications can help stave off the mood disorder.
3. Herbs may not show results for a longer time than conventional drugs and since the effects show up slower, it can be hard to determine whether it is the herbs efficaciousness or something else.
4. The goal of the herbal medicine and other protocols is to help strengthen the underlying problem so that there is less need for herbs and drugs in the future. That their nervous system is tonified.
5. Treatment-any single or compound of herbal medicines in the categories of neurotrophorestorative, nervine, sedative or mood modifier.
6. Often in conjunction with counseling, life-style alterations, a look at diet, and other aspects of their life.

### **Politics of research**

1. The research documenting herbal and alternative treatments are often biased either way depending on who is doing the research. Unless supported by pharmaceutical companies, there is little incentive to invest the type of money that modern drugs receive. Also the parameters for testing drugs and holistic treatments may need to be adjusted to different parameters, such as how to gauge preventative medicine.