

# Integrative Health Group Newsletter

**October 2009**

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## About Integrative Health Group



**Our intention at  
Integrative Health  
Group is to  
profoundly improve  
healthcare in  
America. We are  
doing that by**

## Letter from Dr. Stegall

### Did Someone Say Healthcare Reform?

It never ceases to astonish me how easily our focus in this country is diverted from issues so blatantly obvious that they actually destroy us. Allow me to explain.



I recently read about an inventor in the early days of aviation who plunged from the highest precipice in a crude flying machine constructed only of feathers, small twigs, bark, and twine. Convinced he had finally succeeded in facilitating flight, he jumped with great elation as he relished in the achievement of soaring successfully though space.

But in truth, the ground was rapidly approaching. He eventually began to realize this in escalating detail as he came closer and closer to the terrain beneath him that was littered with the skeletal remains of those who had previously made similar attempts. Yet this impending hero had convinced himself to the bitter end that he only needed to peddle faster. The rest is history.

To me this story is very indicative of the state of American healthcare. While daily we are inundated with news of lengthy orations, media blitzes, and proposed policy about the federal government's ineffectual endeavor to "correct" health insurance, some are actually persuaded that at last our ailing healthcare system is actually on the mend.

Currently many people are allowing the acquisition of a prescription for five dollars that is determined by healthcare coverage to dictate their continued poor health rather than paying out of pocket for healthcare expenditures that would provide the cure! But if we think that is bad, I shudder to think what will happen if healthcare reform that is currently proposed dictates your care. What would be the value of managed cost and

**thorough assessments and follow-ups in order to individualize meaningful and successful health-building programs for each patient. We also feel that education is a powerful tool that enables an individual to make correct choices for improved well-being.**

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insurance controlled by the government when the system of elected officials in Washington, D.C. has never devoted itself to first meet the needs of the society it serves?

Some might argue that people are living longer. If you agree, then take a step back, examine the broader perspective, and you will discover that the ground beneath us is rapidly approaching. People might be kept alive but does quality of life accompany the length of days? Statistically, there is a dramatic increase in the odds of developing cancer, heart disease, strokes, and a host of degenerative conditions.

Is longevity itself any more of an accomplishment than our ancient aviator's free-fall journey? Is it your preference to live with such compromise?

Within the current contemporary medical system, the fundamentals of healthcare are simple to follow. Individuals enter the system only after becoming ill. Patients then present to physicians who focus on two principal issues: the correct diagnosis and the most effective and immediate treatment strategy. After a limited series of short visits, the condition is either stabilized or it subsequently worsens. If the situation deteriorates, the patient enters an institution which offers the latest technological tests in a systematic and predictable manner. The hospital is basically geared to effectively deal with the immediate problem utilizing a strategy shaped by two opposing forces: quality of care versus financial constraints imposed by third party payers.

Assuming that what is considered will perhaps be an improved outcome, the patient re-enters the loop with the same condition that prompted entry in the first place. Returning to the physician, the patient, who is now on a host of medications, continues to endure a chronic illness for which the elusive cure never existed within that medical model. And so the cycle proceeds in a predictable downward spiral.

As a practitioner who is focused on whole person care, I find it obvious that for individuals facing cardiovascular diseases, chronic lung disease, cancer, and diabetes - conditions that are among the leading causes of disability in this nation - major components are sorely lacking in the current and proposed healthcare system. As increasing numbers of people are processed in this loop the public calls healthcare, the system progressively and predictably fails.

The rationale is amazingly simple. Patients remain dependent on an approach that has evolved into a band-aid application. What seems to be fostered is dependency without long-term goals rather than providing an opportunity for education that is a critical investment in well-being for two primary reasons:

1. Lifestyle - Extensive scientific literature has clearly established powerful associations between diet, exercise, stress, alcohol, tobacco, and environmental toxins and a host of serious illnesses.
2. Action - Taking responsibility and control over one's life directly impacts quality of existence and survival in many cases. We must act in accordance to what we say and believe.

Essentially, our nation's healthcare system does not adequately meet needs or expectations. It is time we realize that people are not born with specific instructions. Education is a fundamental and inseparable component of the process of creating or maintaining health. It is our responsibility as citizens, healthcare consumers, and voters to ensure the system is designed from the ground up for longstanding success.

While frustrations exist for patients and healthcare providers alike, it is personally satisfying to know that Integrative Health Group is empowering our community and beyond with the whole person tools and programs we need to improve quality of life and to promote health on many levels. What exactly is the type of care we offer? The answer is a specific type of integrative care called functional medicine.

Functional medicine is personalized medicine that deals with underlying causes and primary prevention instead of lessening of symptoms through pharmaceuticals for serious chronic disease as well as minor dysfunctions. It is a science-based field of health care that is grounded in the following principles:

- Biochemical individuality describes the importance of individual variations in metabolic function that derive from genetic and environmental differences among individuals.
- Patient-centered medicine emphasizes patient care rather than disease care. As Sir William Osler said,

"It is more important to know what patient has the disease than to know what disease the patient has."

- Dynamic balance of internal and external factors involves correcting the internal terrain while constructing everyday attitudes and habits which support improved health and vitality.

The human body functions as an orchestrated network of interconnected systems rather than individual systems functioning autonomously and without effect on each other. For example, we know that immunological dysfunctions can promote cardiovascular disease, that dietary imbalances can cause hormonal disturbances, and that environmental exposures can precipitate neurological syndromes such as Parkinson's disease. Health is a positive vitality and not merely the absence of disease. Therefore, functional medicine emphasizes the promotion of organ reserve as the means to enhance health span.

This type of care is dedicated to improving the management of complex, chronic disease by intervening at multiple levels to address these core clinical imbalances and to restore each patient's functionality and health. Functional medicine is a specific body of knowledge grounded in scientific principles and information widely available in medicine today, but combining research from various disciplines into highly detailed yet clinically relevant models of disease and effective clinical management.

Healthcare this precise emphasizes a definable process of integrating multiple knowledge bases within an intellectual matrix that focuses on functionality at many levels rather than a single treatment for a single diagnosis. Each patient's health problem is evaluated and addressed on an individual basis. This method of care uses the patient's story as a key tool for enacting a comprehensive approach. It is imperative upon me, the doctor, to demonstrate much concentrated focus and discipline with each case, resulting in a valuable transformation of primary care.

Believe me, to break the mold takes commitment, perseverance, and the courage to assess and reform a troubled system deeply steeped in tradition. The willingness to dream, to think out of the box, and to explore the fundamental premises upon which our

present-day healthcare exists is certain to impact the medicine of the future.

At the end of each day as I walk to my car to drive home, I smile because I know we are making a difference and doing our part to make healthcare what it should be. It is reassuring to know that instead of just peddling faster, Integrative Health Group is actually making progress in keeping the ground from rapidly approaching. Yes, we are soaring!

Are you in? Or do you choose to be like the leper in Scripture who sat outside the city wall and was asked the question, "Are we going to sit here until we die?"

**Learn more about Integrative Medicine on our radio talk show *Healthy Alternatives* at AM 660 WLFJ every Tuesday afternoon from 12:30-1:00p**