INTEGRATIVE HEALTH CARE

The State of the Art and Opportunities For the Nursing Profession

The following are Peig Myota’s opening remarks from the Integrative Health Care Conference.

I have been formally studying, practicing and teaching in the field of alternative and complementary medicine for over 10 years. The reason I use the term “formally” is to let you know that we all dabble in this field before we make a commitment to integrate it into our professional work. I can tell you from experience, the more you learn, the more there is to learn.

I have been privileged in my training to work with leading practitioners on a national and international basis, including Caroline Myss, Ph.D., and Norm Shealy, M.D. During the six years I owned and managed a holistic health center, I brought many of these incredible teachers to my center to help me develop a practitioner training program for my staff and other professionals in the community. I have also been fortunate during my training to travel to China, Russia, Central Asia, Australia, Germany and New Zealand to learn about healing modalities used in other parts of the world. I am currently doing holistic health consulting, counseling and teachings having learned my true path was not to be a business manager.

The field of natural, alternative and complementary health care is growing very rapidly for a number of reasons:

• People are dissatisfied with conventional medicine that is perceived as ineffectual, too expensive, or too focused on curing disease rather than maintaining good health.

• An ABC News-Washington Post poll done in October 2003 found that 54% of respondents were dissatisfied with the overall quality of traditional health care in the United States, and 6 out of 10 people surveyed were worried about being able to afford health care in the future.

• Complementary and alternative health care mirror people’s own values, beliefs and philosophical orientation toward health and life.

• 67% of health insurance companies offer coverage for at least one form of alternative health care.

Consumers want to take responsibility for their health, choosing their providers and modality of health care. Americans are using natural, alternative and complementary health care in growing numbers:

• Two-thirds of Americans have tried at least one form of alternative therapy.

• 69% of Americans use non-conventional treatment therapies

• Americans made an estimated 425 million visits to alternative health care providers in 1990, exceeding the 338 million visits to all U.S. primary care physicians during that period

• Annual visits to alternative practitioners grew from 427 million in 1970 to 629 million in 1997, nearly double the number of visits to all primary care physicians [386 million] during that same period.

• According to the WHO of the United Nations, between 65% and 80% of the world’s health care services currently would fall under the category of alternative and complementary therapies.

The establishment of the office of Alternative Medicine within the NIH has added legitimacy to the field. In 1995 the AMCA adopted a resolution suggesting its 300,000 members become better informed regarding the practice and techniques of alternative therapies:

• 50% of physicians surveyed expect to start making or increase homeopathic and holistic recommendations in 2001.

• In a 1995 study, 180 family physicians reported a high degree of interest in alternative health care.

• Approximately 300 out of 572 primary care internists surveyed indicated they would encourage patients to use alternative health care.

• In a 1994 survey, more than 60% of doctors from a wide range of specialties recommended alternative health care to their patients at least once.

• 47% of the doctors in this survey reported using alternative therapies themselves.

The terminology that is currently being used to define the growing field co-authored by Wisconsin’s own Roxana Huebscher, a nurse and associate professor in the College of Nursing at UW-Okshosh, she eloquently discusses terminology, as well as the philosophical issues that make it impossible in the evolution of medicine to combine the use of the terms “complementary and alternative medicine.” That is why I use the terminol-
to their inner calling to determine how best to assist others in their healing process? How dare we judge others who have used ancient healing practices for thousands of years, just because of philosophical differences?

Where does the fear come from that would motivate a practitioner from a traditional background to criticize healing methods they know nothing about, or to report an alternative practitioner to the state licensing board? Is it fear of losing patients, fear of losing money, fear of the unknown, fear of change, or all of the above.

Are you aware that currently in the state of Wisconsin that over 20 respected, qualified nurses, doctors, dentists and chiropractors have spent thousands of dollars defending themselves before the licensing board because other practitioners have filed complaints against them for practicing alternative health care?

Are you aware that the WNA approved a position paper and presented it to the state licensing board that states nurses who practice alternative therapies are practicing within their scope of practice? Are you aware that the state licensing board approved a motion that the Wisconsin Nurse Practice Act does not preclude the use of complementary and alternative health care modalities?

Are you aware that this controversy is going on in 30 other states? Are you aware that through the work of the Wisconsin Health Freedom Coalition, our state has joined 17 other states, including Minnesota and Iowa, to introduce legislation that protects the rights of consumers to choose alternative health care, and the right of practitioners to practice that health care?

"I wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed being a part of this conference. I hope it is the first of many! I know many alternative therapists and have participated in many yoga and health conferences. None have had a nursing focus, or talked about nursing professionals succeeding in their creative ventures. This was very exciting. I think we all felt the energy!"

—Anna Rychnor, RN, Certified Yoga Instructor

Southern Herb Company was just one of the exhibitors that participated in the conference.

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I recently attended the National Health Freedom Conference in Minnesota. I learned that we must pass laws that continue to protect the right of every citizen in this nation to choose their health care. This is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed to us from our forefathers.

Do you choose to be involved in the process that will guarantee this right, or do you choose to let others make policies for you that may impose on your right to choose and practice alternative health care? I urge you to join the WHFC to support these efforts. I urge you to contact your state legislators to let them know you demand the right to choose health care freedom.

Nurses have been involved in practicing whole self-care since the time of Florence Nightingale. The terminology that we use has changed over time. Care for the whole person is essential to the practice of nursing whether we call it a biopsychosocial approach, psychoneuroimmunology, holistic health or body-mind-spirit health care. There are hundreds of alternative modalities that nurses can be trained to use to assist others in the healing process. The NIH has categorized these modalities, including:

- Alternative health care systems, e.g. homeopathy
- Mind-body-spirit interventions, e.g. meditation
- Biologic-based therapies, e.g. vitamin and herbal supplementation
- Manipulative and body-based therapies, like massage
- Energy-based therapies, such as Reiki or therapeutic touch

For definitions and additional information, I would refer you to Huelscher’s book or the NIH Web site at nccam.nih.gov/.

One of the arguments against using these alternative modalities is that there is not enough evidence-based research to prove their effectiveness. I disagree with that opinion. The research has and continues to be done with positive results. One example is research done by in 1972 by Delores Krieger, a professor at New York University School of Nursing. Therapeutic touch is now being taught in over 150 universities worldwide. It is practiced by an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 professionals around the world, generally nurses, and is offered in over 200 hospitals in the United States. Our own UW-Madison has been doing research on how meditation can produce lasting effects on the immune system and physical body. I would refer you also to James Oschman’s book Energy Medicine — The Scientific Basis for some of the most exciting research and innovative theoretical work being done in the field of alternative health.

In closing, I would like to address how increasing consumer and practitioner interest in alternative health continues to open doors of opportunity for the profession of nursing. One of the benefits of new options to integrate natural, alternative therapies into the field of nursing is that it is attracting new interest in the field of nursing. This is an exciting time for the profession of nursing. Whether nurses choose to set up independent practices and businesses, or integrate these therapies into the more traditional health care system, it is allowing us to use our creativity and passion to help others heal.

I believe nursing is going to lead the way in transforming the Western medical treatment system into a model of integrative health care that incorporates using loving energy to heal the body, mind and spirit.

I believe that incorporating alternative health care into our nursing education system is going to help dispel the fear of the unknown and enhance the way we teach nursing as both an art and a science. I believe using an integrative approach to health care will assist our patients in their healing process and offer the opportunity for them to reach their highest potential to achieve physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual wholeness.

I know nurses who are using an integrative body-mind-spirit approach to assist others heal and receive, in return, the powerful validation that they are following their soul’s chosen purpose. The time has come for us to speak our truth and to take on the responsibility to help evolve a new model of health care. A model based on compassion that will once again instill trust and gratitude in the health care system from those who count on us to ease their pain and assist them in their life’s healing journey.

You are the pioneers. You are the change makers. Please take this responsibility seriously.

Peig Myota, BSN, MSW, BCD, is a holistic health consultant, counselor and teacher. She can be reached at 262-369-4915 or at peigmyota@core.com.