

Restorative Care Far Outweighs Symptomatic Relief

Let's say you have been diagnosed with gastrointestinal reflux. You may end up taking Zantac, Tagamet, Nexium, Prilosec or even Prevacid. All of the above drugs turn down or shut off the body's ability to make or secrete stomach acid.

At the time of your diagnosis, your health care provider explained the condition and why he or she was prescribing the particular medication. After a short time, you find that the drugs are working well and that your reflux problem has improved or even disappeared. What a relief not to feel the heartburn anymore.

However, no underlying problems have been addressed in the process. Why did you develop the problem in the first place? With the symptoms now under control, how will you know what your body was trying to tell you? How will you know if you are well enough to stop taking the medicine? If the problem was brought on by something you did, how will you ever know what to change about your eating habits or your lifestyle?

Your disease did not appear out of nowhere. Red flags should have gone up in your mind when you were handed a prescription without a clear explanation of what you must have done (or not done) to suffer from this condition, not to mention what you should do to fully recover.

What's missing? Restoration.

This is how the medical paradigm works. I like to compare it to putting a strip of black electrical tape over the flashing red oil light on the dashboard of your car and then proclaiming the problem as "fixed." It addresses your symptoms and provides relief from them without paying attention to their underlying causes.

Contrast this with a holistic, restorative approach to health care, in which a person looks at a symptom and says, "This body of mine is trying to tell me about something that is wrong. I need to translate what it's saying and do something about it." In other words, "My car's dashboard oil light is flashing red. It's telling me that the oil in the engine has reached a level that is unhealthy for the engine. I need to add some oil immediately, before additional damage to the engine occurs."

In the holistic model of care, symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, a runny nose, excess earwax, swollen tonsils, body odor and low back spasms are considered to be normal body reactions to negative developments within a person's body. These symptoms cannot be equated with the disease itself, and medicating them away is only a palliative measure.

In holistic terms, diarrhea means that the intestines are trying to rid themselves of something they have deemed harmful, such as a toxin, bad bacteria or a food to which the person has developed a sensitivity. Doesn't that make sense? Since diarrhea is the body's way of dealing with a problem, the best solution should not be taking a medication to stop the diarrhea. Taking an over-the-counter drug to stop the diarrhea will only keep the irritant in the colon longer, increasing the chance of more damage.

The body is smart. It is trying to prevent disease and heal itself. When the cells of the intestinal lining encounter abnormal bacteria or when toxins enter the gastrointestinal tract, the physical response is, "Remove this as quickly as possible." If this happens early on, vomiting will result. This is a good thing. The body sacrifices comfort in the short term to prevent long-term disease or damage.

By personality, I am non-confrontational. I dread to hear the words, "Can we talk?" I know they can lead to hours of conversation—oftentimes focused on the fact that I have done

something wrong. I prefer peace. However, I have come to realize that the hours of confrontation (if done right) will almost always result in a truer peace, better teamwork, and more contentment. I've come to see that it's worth it. That's another example of enduring short-term pain for the sake of long-term benefit.

A patient came to see me. She had ulcerative colitis, and she had been under the care of a medical doctor. She had received four pints of blood in the previous four weeks because she had lost so much blood via her stools. There really was no hope in sight, which is why she decided to go beyond the medical doctors and specialists and at least "try" me.

By her second visit, I had determined that she had inflammation in her lower bowels because abnormal bacteria had set up house in her colon, where they were causing excessive inflammation to the point of bleeding. All I needed to do was give her a strong natural antibiotic, and the diarrhea stopped within a week. The bleeding stopped within two weeks. Pretty soon her color returned and she was back to normal.

To think that she had been suffering for so long with something that was so easily corrected! Unfortunately, this kind of thing happens far too often. This is why I am taking the time to start this book with an in-depth look at these two paradigms. We need to know what we're dealing with. If the old paradigm we have been relying upon has some major omissions or errors, we need to be able to identify them, admit them and stop relying on them.

New Testament Parallels

Interestingly, the holistic approach to health care parallels the biblical view of the body of people known as the church. This well known passage of New Testament Scripture compares the church to the human body:

"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all

the members of the body, through they are many, are one body, also is Christ ... For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. .. But God has so composed the body ... so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Cor. 12-26)

Within the local church, if one of the members struggles with something, acting dysfunctionally, how does God want us to respond? As we can see from the abundant advice in the New Testament, He wants us to figure out the problem and correct it. If someone has been alienated, He wants us to make every effort to lovingly restore that person to a right relationship with God and with his or her local church family.

If I have a pain in my knee, the easy solution would be to take ibuprofen or some kind of painkiller. Poof. The pain is gone. But the dysfunction remains. If I have "issues" and I act like a creep around women, my church could attempt to solve the problem by simply barring me from women-oriented ministries and asking someone to keep an eye on me. But that won't heal my problem, will it? Instead, I need their help to figure out what started this, why I continue in this pattern, and what I can do to change it. I need to have God and his people come alongside me to help me clean up the mess and become a new creature. Sure, managing my "creepiness" is easier and less time-consuming, but we can all agree that I won't be healed or restored as a result.

In other words, God's way of attaining healthy "body life" is restoration, even if it requires extreme patience and much wisdom. He does not want us to numb the pain or banish the troublemaker.

My approach to health care is like that, holistic and

restorative. I will use Band-Aids if I must, but I prefer to keep a symptom in plain view so I can determine if my solution is working.

This is an excerpt from Michael Berglund's book, Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired.

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