

Nancy Utter column from Nov. 13, 2006

Headline:

Natural medicine taps body's innate healing power

Story:

Welcome to the first edition of Green Medicine. This monthly column will provide the reader with news and information about natural and alternative medicines. Several alternative health-care practitioners will take turns writing, and future topics will include food as medicine, herbal medicine, homeopathy, acupuncture and Chinese medicine, and osteopathy. The goal of this column is to provide interesting, practical information that you can use in your daily life and when making decisions about your health care. Natural medicine is a hot topic, with more people in the U.S. trying natural and alternative medicines than ever before.

A 2002 study by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, a division of the National Institutes of Health, and the National Center for Health Statistics, a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found that 36 percent of U.S. adults are using some form of alternative medicine. That means that one-third of Americans are looking outside the box of conventional medicine to improve their health and well-being.

Why are so many people trying natural and alternative medicine? There are many different answers to that question. Some of the answers I hear from my patients are self-empowerment, drug safety concerns, desire for a preventive approach to health care and dissatisfaction with the conventional medical approach. The basic philosophical premise of natural medicine is that the body will heal from disease if given what it needs to do so and if obstacles to healing are removed. The main idea is to support the body in its own innate process of healing. For example, anxiety often can be caused by a deficiency of B vitamins. If the body is given the B vitamins that it is missing, it will correct the anxiety and a cure is achieved.

It takes time and lots of questions to get to the root of the cause of disease, and natural medicine practitioners typically spend many hours with the people whom they work with to unravel their stories. Unfortunately, our bodies do not come with an owner's manual of operation. Natural medicine practitioners spend much of their time on educating their

patients on health and lifestyle issues. The idea is to help people understand their bodies better and then help them take the steps of change that will allow their bodies to heal.

Another aspect of natural medicine that appeals to people is the fact that the medicine is individualistic and based upon the unique expression of disease in each person. It is the person who is treated, not the disease. Also, natural medicine and naturopathic medicine in particular, seek to treat the whole person. Body, mind and spirit are inextricably bound together with changes in each affecting the others. The goal is optimal health and well-being in all realms.

My belief is that we are all unique and that health care that respects our inherent uniqueness can heal us. There are no absolute right or wrong answers in health care, and the best medicine is that which helps each person achieve a sustainable state of health and wholeness for the long term. We can use the best of all that we have available to reach this goal.

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