



# Understanding Integrative Approaches To Health And Mental Health Care

## The Focus is on Whole-Person Health



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When health care practitioners view their patients as partners and when there is as much concern for feelings, relationships, spirituality and the sustainability of the environment as there is for physical health, a new healing system arises. In this new integrative system, the goal of treatment is much more than the absence of symptoms or disease; it is optimal health of mind, body, and spirit.

### What Is Integrative Health Care?

Integrative health care is based on the philosophy that health is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors such as life choices, environment, genetic makeup, intimate relationships, and the meaning and purpose in life. As a model it is collaborative and multidisciplinary. It is open to and recognizes the importance

of conventional medicine, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), mental health care, and mind-body approaches (such as meditation, yoga, hypnotherapy, Reiki, and therapeutic massage). There is a respect for each individual's journey and for the stories that make up the history of their lives. There is a belief that these "biographies" influence the biology that manifests in illness or in health. Integrative health care supports all of the important aspects of life, including creativity, cultural expression and the celebration of community. To have "health" means that the whole person is in balance – physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Therefore, there is no "health" without "mental health."

*"There is no health without mental health."*

### What Is An Integrative Approach To Mental Health Care?

Integrative mental health is an evolving, whole-systems approach to wellness of mind, body, and spirit. It considers that symptoms are associated with multiples causes and that multiple approaches to assessment and treatment may be necessary so that each individual may attain an optimal state of health and well-being. Therefore, the integrative mental health profes-

sional is knowledgeable about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and trained in the "art of collaboration" so that they can discuss patient care with medical doctors, as well. The goal is to understand as much as possible about the whole person and to be aware of what treatments are occurring simultaneously. Approximately half of the individuals diagnosed with mood or anxiety disorders are using a combination of therapies and conventional and "natural" drugs to alleviate symptoms. For this reason, it is important for health care professionals to ask the right questions and to collaborate in seeking answers when treating individuals who come seeking help.

Today, these individuals may first seek counsel from a medical doctor, a chiropractor, an acupuncturist, or a psychotherapist. Therefore, it is important that patients disclose all of their treatments to all of their health care professionals. Mental health professionals trained in integrative approach-

es frequently serve as the historians of each patient's care, especially since they are the ones who spend the most time with each patient during the course of treatment.

### How do you find an integrative health or integrative mental health professional?

Since there are no legal standards that define words such as "holistic" or "integrative," advertisements don't necessarily give us any clear indication of the training, education or credibility of the professionals behind the ads. Therefore, it is important for consumers to do some research when seeking professionals who are truly integrative.

#### There are some key questions to ask:

- 1 What is your education and training?
- 2 Have you had specialized training in integrative health and/or mental health care?
- 3 Are you comfortable working in collaboration with diverse health care professionals?
- 4 Can I discuss with you my choice to use multiple treatments without being judged?

5 If I want you to, will you speak to my other health care professionals about my care?

Most of all make sure that all of your health care providers consider you to be a partner with them in your health care process. You have choices to make with respect to the course of your treatment. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Let your providers know about all of the medications you are taking, including those that are "natural" and those that you self-prescribe including alcohol and "recreational" drugs. Trust your intuition when choosing your health care providers. Remember that you are entrusting them with your *whole* life.

*Carol L. Veizer, MA, ACS, NCC, LPC is the founder and director of the NJ Center for the Healing Arts, which has been designated as one of the first integrative mental health centers in the country. Since 1989, Carol and her team of mental health and complementary and alternative health care professionals have offered opportunities for the integration of mind-body and spirit. "NJCHA" is also a highly sought after internship and practicum site for graduate students in the mental health professions who are seeking additional training in integrative mental health care.*

**Client Testimonial . . .** *The NJ Center for the Healing Arts was a "last resort" for me. I had been to several therapists and doctors in an effort to manage chronic pain. Nothing worked for very long. The professionals treating me seemed to be competing with each other. At "NJCHA," I was treated as a whole person. Through counseling and hypnotherapy I shifted my perception of pain. By adding complementary and alternative healing modalities, I got back quality of life.*

- Donna, Middletown, NJ

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