



December 2004

"Integrative Medicine: Expanding Options"

Health care professionals well understand that change is rampant in the health care industry, as millions of Americans reach out for care, at a ratio of nearly 2 to 1, to a host of "non-conventional" providers, including acupuncturists, Chinese medicine practitioners, naturopaths, and many others.

Beyond the simple question of multiple treatment choices is the key concept of *integration* of these services: "conventional" allopathic physicians and "non-conventional" practitioners *joining together* to better serve the health care needs of patients.

In the pages of *Health & Healing*, there are many examples of the idea of *integration* at work. The publication's medical editor, Dr. Mark McClure, is a traditionally trained urologist who gained certification as a holistic physician to better serve his patients in an integrated way. Dr. José Armstrong, specialist in internal medicine, works side-by-side with a chiropractor, acupuncturists, and a variety of therapists, especially to ease pain. Dr. Jim Dykes opened his family practice after coming out of Duke in the mid-1980s and immediately called it Integrative Health Care—a forerunner of change in the health delivery system. Many others offer services in an integrated fashion. They are representative of this new era of integrative medicine—practicing a style of medicine that is holistic and attuned to the individual needs of patients.

Some allopathic doctors point out that too often, patients pursue unconventional healing methods without consulting their primary care physicians—which can certainly complicate treatment plans. When patients mix herbal remedies with pharmaceutical prescriptions, for example, there can be serious adverse consequences. The idea of multiple—almost limitless—choices is also a complicating factor. For example, hundreds of thousands of health websites are both a blessing and a curse—to consumers and to their caregivers—as they offer detailed and often conflicting information about every imaginable mental, physical, psychological, and spiritual infirmity known to man.

Our goal in the December issue of *Health & Healing in the Triangle* will be to take an in-depth look at "integrative medicine" and its collective parts—conventional medicine, alternative and complementary therapies, and natural health therapies—and examine how they best work together in a synergistic fashion and what cautions patients need to consider as they engage with "non-conventional" caregivers.

We start this exploration with the knowledge that such modalities as massage, counseling, Reiki, yoga, biofeedback, chiropractic, hypnosis, homeopathy, naturopathy, cranio-sacral therapy, and mainstream allopathic medicine can and often do work well with each other, sometimes as part of a unified, integrated team. There is mounting evidence that such an integrated approach leads to safer, faster, and more permanent healing. And it is appropriate to consider the cautions and concerns that exist in this blending approach.

Conventional and alternative practitioners representing a host of disciplines are invited to be part of this conversation. As always, *Health & Healing in the Triangle* will share these ideas and philosophies with 80,000+ well-educated, well-informed, affluent adults who care a great deal about health care options. Many of them are already well-connected with allopathic, CAM, and natural healing practitioners. Our collective task is to give them good information about these choices.