

December 2010

Greetings!

There will be no new office policy changes this year. In last year's newsletter, I described three office policy changes that I planned to implement beginning June 1, 2010 in order to streamline my procedures and enhance my time energy balance. To summarize, I asked you to help me by planning ahead in three areas: obtain your prescriptions during session, get supplements you need at the end of your session, and for those very few people who come for a minimum check up every six months, schedule your next visit at the end of your current one.

The most significant of those changes, asking you to get your routine prescriptions during our session, has worked out exceptionally well. I want to thank each and every one of you for working with me on this. Intellectually I knew that filling routine prescriptions for you outside of sessions took substantial time and energy. It was not until we made the change that I truly grasped how much that additional task added to my daily stress. I view many moments as teaching opportunities. What comes to my mind in this instance is the old adage "see one, do one, teach one." I think there is applicability here.

Part of the "meta" message in my asking you to help me by taking responsibility to proactively get your needs met is that I am balancing my life better, i.e., doing growth work. My hope is that you will experience the office policy changes in that light ("See One"). I often find it takes courage to change. Change can be unsettling and sometimes threatening to implement because of how we might judge ourselves or fear that others would judge us (lazy, mean, cold, or whatever painful label you want to use).

So I strongly encourage you to look at your life and see if there are any areas where you over function or feel out of balance. If so, try to pick one tangible small thing and make a change ("Do One"). As you grow healthier, you will send a signal to those close to you that you have more self respect and a healthier "time energy" budget. People may even notice you seem calmer or happier and perhaps will even inquire what is different. Ah ha! An opportunity. ("Teach One")

Much of last year's letter discussed office policy changes and getting a healthier "time-energy" balance in our lives. I promised to write extra on the topic of functional medicine this year. How to include all that I learned in two years. Impossible. But I shall mention a few important ideas.

Terrain. Rainbow. I find these words coming to mind frequently. You would think I attended "green" conferences this summer! (I suppose given the high emphasis on nutrition, you might say I did attend green...) Actually, these words capture/recall different themes that I feel I "internalized" during my functional medicine conferences this summer. (For those of you new to my practice, I am a grateful, humble student in the Institute for Functional Medicine (IFM). To me, functional medicine is "better medicine." If you have a couple of minutes, I invite you to read the Institute's fairly brief and articulate description about functional medicine. To do so, please go to Functionalmedicine.org and click on "What is functional medicine?" They also provide a white paper for those of you more formally trained in medicine and/or education.)

The IFM holds a yearly symposium, usually in May. They announce the topic almost a year in advance – this year's was to be Cancer. At first I was very disappointed. My thoughts went something like this — bummer. Why couldn't they offer a topic more relevant to psychiatry? Cancer! That is a frightening, complex, and rapidly evolving field -- although the science is very exciting, elegant, and wildly compelling. Do I have to go to this conference? Gosh. I am a psychiatrist! I am not supposed to be an oncologist.

At this point, I realized that I was feeling the emotional reactions of "fight, flight and freeze" in response to a perceived danger. I stopped and asked myself why was I feeling so intimidated.

I have learned over the years that denial and avoidance are not very adaptive defense mechanisms in the long run. Unconsciously, I react to cancer as a terrifying disease. To me, maybe only auto immune diseases are as

frightening. Perhaps I feel that other equally dangerous diseases are easier to detect -- such as diabetes and heart disease, i.e., check blood pressure or blood sugar. Even infections seem more tractable. Of course, this is objectively absurd. People die from heart attacks without any warning, infections can be fatal, and some cancers are curable. All disease involves very complex mechanisms and dys-regulation.

So I continued to dig deeper to understand myself better. What I discovered is that symbolism was at the root of my fear. Symbolically, I see the cells of one's body as "Self." My assumptions about "Self" would mean that all cells work together for the common good. No insurgents, dictators, civil war, or hit men (auto immune). Cancer and auto immune diseases symbolically strike me as if one's home team had gone renegade -- a divided "Self."

Now, I knew before last year that I would be going to each and every IFM symposium. Every IFM conference is not to be missed. The scholarship and integrity of the organization make it a stellar event. I wanted to be "excited" about the topic and to be a happy, active participant. I decided to be mindful and insightful of my symbolism and go with a "can learn" attitude.

As May approached, I realized just how many of you, whom I care for in every sense of the word, have been affected by cancer in a relative or in your own life. Wow! I do not want to be less educated because of symbolism and avoidance. I felt that in deepening this area of my study of functional medicine, I could glean enough from the intense science to make dealing with my insecurities well worth it.

So off I went. The conference was absolutely fabulous! I walked away with "terrain" resonating in my very core. My understanding of a few of the "take home messages" that different speakers presented during the conference are as follows. Most of us make an average of 500-1000 cancer cells per day. Naturally, we have evolved myriad elegant and awe-inspiring mechanisms for surveying and eliminating those cells.

I want to introduce a current concept I learned in the detoxification and immune surveillance module. The question raised was how much of your destiny was strictly dictated by your DNA? If you have a mutation (alteration in the amino acid sequence in your DNA) is that it? Say Alzheimer's' disease and the Apo E 4 mutation. As I understand it, the most recent study estimates that thirty percent of your health span is dictated by your genetics (DNA-genome). So what determines the rest of your health destiny? Seventy percent is influenced by your life choices ---which create a complex environment that can also affect your DNA or the expression of your DNA (epigenome).

So where does terrain enter the picture? The image I have is of a fragile cancer cell--like a seed. From what I understand, most cancer cells are very fragile. The "soil" or terrain in which it sits has a significant effect on how well the cell grows: nutrients, air quality, relative lack of predators, etc. If you alter your terrain to be favorable for your optimal health, cancer cells have unfavorable and even hostile environment. HMMMMMMMM.

So I walked away (or flew home) thinking about the lessons I'd learned to obtain optimal wellness "terrain." A functional medicine concept in any healing process is to take away the bad and give the good -- bodies have AMAZING capacities to heal. But for most of us what constitutes the "bad" and the "good"? Here are some ideas from the conference. Cancer cells hate oxygen (now that's not very precise or even verbatim, but that is what I learned as a "take home message"). So exercise and breathe! Stay away from oxidizing stuff. Like petrochemicals, heavy metals, processed foods, stress, electromagnetic radiation, etc. Bodies love laughing and playing. So laugh and play. There's a lot of scary stuff in the water. So be careful to drink good water. Bodies like to be svelte and strong. So don't eat too many luscious treats. Bodies like to get good sleep to rest and repair. So try to get good sleep. Bodies hate chronic stress. So do your best, emotionally and spiritually, to eliminate anything toxic in your life and replace it with joy.

The speakers at the conference dazzled me with peer-reviewed articles and research supporting the above, do-able, sane "simple" advice. LOTS of science. Yummm! Dr Dean Ornish spoke. Another Wow! He seems to me to be an amazing man who treated men who had prostate cancer with diet, exercise, and meditation and obtained excellent results. He subsequently got those results published in a prestigious, peer-reviewed medical journal. So if you get or have cancer, I recommend going the integrative functional medicine route. They do best conventional medical practice with the awareness that we aren't simply treating the "enemy" - Cancer-, but restoring balance and vibrant health.

It seems to me suffering with a disease like cancer could be traumatic and sad. If you choose to stay ignorant and passive, it seems grim and tragic. But you can make many proactive, spiritually, and scientifically sound changes to alter your current destiny -- even if you feel well right now. One reoccurring message was that the environment in America is so very toxic: food, air, water, soil, buildings, electromagnetic radiation, emotional, economic. To me it seems hard to fight human/cultural greed, ignorance, and passivity to make wide-scale sweeping changes. And yet, when you make a wise choice to buy organic food, for example, you help create a market for better, non-polluting farming practices. I think that personal health choices can redound to local and national changes -- like moms wanting safe baby bottles. All potential tragedy and suffering are opportunities for insight and healing.

So where does rainbow fit in. In July I went to the advanced module on Detoxification. Excellent. But grim. Very grim. We live in a horrendously polluted world! Oh my! What to do in order to be cognizant of a few of the dangers? Without going broke or crazy? I suggest at least glancing at the book Clean, Green, and Lean. It is full of data on some environmental dangers and lots of ideas about how to detoxify your diet and home. I do not recommend following his plan as is. But the book does give you some background. (Who would have guessed that fresh-cut flowers, innocent cheerful little blooms could be off gassing pesticides!)

And have you ever noticed so many chemicals starting with the letter "P" seem dangerous? PCB's, perchlorates, phthalates, PVC, petroleum products, and the list goes on. And on. Fortunately, the detoxification conference offered many practical ideas to incorporate into your life that help protect you from the toxic environment in which we live. That's where rainbow enters the picture. They prescribe, as if it were a medication, eating 7-9 brightly colored fruits and veggies daily. Rainbow. Since I mentioned the "P" words, aren't pesticide and preservatives P words? Yes. Thus, I highly recommend visiting the web site EWG.org to look up the must avoid (dirty dozen) and the okay mostly (clean 15).

While I am on the topic of ewg, their website has another awesome feature called skin deep. We absorb molecules through our skin. I have read between forty to sixty percent of what you put on your skin can be absorbed. Think about nicotine and estrogen patches, etc. So when you have a moment, I suggest you visit ewg.org, click on "skin deep" and enter the name of your, say for example, toothpaste. You can find out how toxic your soap, shampoo, hand lotion, sun screen, etc., are. Also, you can type in the word toothpaste and they list all the toothpastes in order of least to most toxic, with elaborate scientific explanations as to why. I had a few rude shocks in looking up some of the products I used. And to my further shock and horror, organic was no guarantee of safe. Is nothing sacred? On the other hand, working hard to keep a balanced perspective, I think to myself plague and botulism are "organic."

So to help you with rainbow, I will enclose in this newsletter a recipe for a holiday green smoothie.

Warmest wishes,

Nina Pesante, MD

BASIC GREEN SMOOTHIE RECIPE

In your blender pour in 2 cups great quality cold water.

Add 2+ cups of “leaves” (spinach, mixed salad greens, kale, collard greens, Swiss chard, etc.) Must be organic!

Add 1 at a time the quarters of 1 large organic apple or 2 to 3 small ones

½ of a ripe avocado (I use ½ a large California or 1 whole small California)

Juice from ½ of a lime or a lemon if you want to

HOLIDAY GREEN SMOOTHIE RECIPE

2 cups great quality cold water

2 to 4 cups organic baby spinach

1 large or 2-3 small organic red apples

1 small California avocado or ½ of a large one

Juice from ½ lemon or lime

1 quarter cup goji berries

1 stalk organic celery

1 small clump of brocco-sprouts

½ cup pomegranate juice

I also like to add fresh herbs such as basil, dill, oregano, cilantro, and thyme. Or whatever I have on hand. BTW, this is a serious high powered super food drink with excellent detoxification properties. And it tastes good!

As I mentioned last year, this makes two to three servings. I store mine in glass – Ball canning jars. One serving plus a piece of chicken or whatever makes a quick lunch.