

December 2006

Greetings!

I wrote the original draft of this newsletter and sat down with my amazing secretary to finalize it. She actually had a copy of the 2005 letter on her computer. I laughed out loud when I realized I had started this year's letter with two of the verbatim sentiments that I did last year! (The first was being staggered that a whole year had flown by, and the second being so happy to have found the field of functional medicine and recognizing that I am such a beginner.)

In truth, writing to you each year provides me with an occasion to reflect on my journey. My deepest commitment is to self-understanding as the bedrock for living a healthier and more fulfilling life. What has become clearer to me over time is that when someone doesn't feel well, it is hard to get healthy and harder still to live life well. I strive to help you get and stay well. What this means to me keeps unfolding. In my opinion, to be a better healer includes a fluent grasp of the meaning of body wellness/disease, the possibility of healing through insight, and the interplay between mind and body. My formal education each year mirrors my favorite arenas of interest. Thus, in addition to my usual activities, I have continued my ongoing education which included conferences, reading the textbook of Functional Medicine, and starting consultation/ supervision with a functional medicine mentor, Dr. Hayes in Maine.

I respect and continue to work on improving my knowledge in the art of traditional psychiatry. I attended the annual week long update in psychopharmacology last February; the one I participate in every other spring if possible. This conference focuses on the best evidence-based traditional scientific and therapeutic modalities used by psychiatrists in treating currently defined psychiatric conditions. While attending this conference and each time I read journals etc., I look back over the last (eek!) twenty years that I have been studying and working in the discipline of psychiatry. I am heartened by the unfolding saga to better understand, define, and help people who struggle with psychiatric disorders. There have been epic changes since the time when I was a youngster back in 1986, and first met traditional psychiatry in my third year of medical school.

Those of you who have worked with me might say "But Dr. P, you are less fond of using traditional psychiatric medications to treat disorders than you were ten years ago." There is truth in this statement. In order to understand this phenomenon, I need to look back over my development. From early high school on, my interest was strongly excited by understanding people from a psychological, philosophical, insight-oriented perspective and not so much by a biological one. Through college I enjoyed science but loved philosophy and growth work. I went through four years of medical school as well as my first year of residency with a strong tendency to approach helping others primarily oriented by insight. In my second year of residency, my attention was riveted by witnessing patients suffering severe distress helped by clear psychiatric diagnosis and excellent medication management. I was fortunate to have several mentors who taught me the art of thorough psychiatric diagnoses and the use of psychiatric medications with state of the art knowledge and imagination. I left residency with my love of insight and growth balanced by a psychiatric clinical diagnosis/medication approach. I embraced the belief that I could "cure" a patient's suffering by employing impeccable psychiatric diagnoses to inform my medication choices. (I find it amusing to note the magical thinking from that period of time.)

I discovered that the treatments I used did not work reliably, were temporary, or were "discovered" to be highly flawed and thus discarded by the psychiatric community. Over the last ten

years, I have been working more in basic biology – i.e., diet, better lab testing, etc., to help patients. I learned about EMDR, EFT, and even took some hypnosis-therapy training. My practical experience was that I still could not get some folks well. This challenge left me wanting a better understanding of what made someone feel unwell. In the late nineties, for example, I focused more on the role hormones played and studied the latest information. Some of what I read and learned was from sources that to me displayed good science and even rarer, common sense. However, the conclusions I came to did not always dovetail with the tenets of the traditional medical establishment at the time. This caused consternation for me and for you. (For example, those of you who worked with me might remember how disturbed I became by the use of Premerine when it was still widely touted and used.)

I have come to realize that functional medicine appeals to me so much because I am hopeful it is an approach I can use to find more fundamental causes and treatments to understand more dimensions of health to help someone get physically well or to prevent a disease. When you walk into my office, in my eyes you are an amazing and unique human being. You have your own genetics, family history, personal history, molecular history (nutrients, toxic exposures, life style influences) and personality. It can be difficult to help you become and stay well if I am missing parts of the puzzle that may be having an impact on you. For example, not breathing good quality air. This is such an important parameter in wellness. Obviously, I am not speaking here of all or nothing or for ten seconds. I am referring to suboptimal conditions over short or longer periods of time. How often can diseases be caused by or worsened by sub-optimal air. Often. It is neat to note in the literature both psychiatric and other the different diseases that can be improved by careful attention when warranted and practical to improving air quality.

Another area I have been learning more about is the role of nasal/sinus congestion and/or illness in psychiatric wellness. There are so many reasons someone can struggle with sub-optimal oxygenation and the diverse consequences it can cause that it only makes sense to me to learn more and to use new tools if possible. I have personally and with others had some good success with a tool called Nasaline syringe. (I noticed it is for sale locally at the health food store Down to Earth.) This is a workable way of washing out your nose and sinuses with clean salt water. It dramatically decreases congestion and even helps to prevent or decrease symptoms of a cold. If you struggle with allergies and sinus congestion, learning how to keep your sinuses less inflamed can make a remarkable difference in mental clarity and in energy.

On an ironic but humorous note, those of you who have been aware of my ongoing efforts to renovate my office undoubtedly noticed no structural changes took place in my office. There is a small but remote possibility that during my hiatus this year, my landlord and I will sign a lease and begin the office renovations. I will of course let you know.

Looking ahead to next year I am really excited to continue my studies during my time away in functional medicine and working on my personal health and insight. After my return in April, I hope to attend a couple of conferences. The first occurs in late May and is the symposium on functional medicine. The second is a week long functional medicine class in late November. However, this conference might get postponed because they are in the midst of changing their curriculum. At the symposium, I am hoping to meet some functional medicine psychiatrists and learn how they choose to integrate functional medicine in their practices.

Occasionally someone will ask me what books I have been reading lately. Well, I am currently working on a few ... the latest ones are Ultra Metabolism, the Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, and Body, Mind and Sport. I just got my two volume updated text book in Natural Medicine. I think that this will be a project for the upcoming year.

Thank you again for filling out and returning the annual patient information form. If you joined my practice in the last twelve months and there are no changes in your name, address, or phone numbers, you do not need to return the form.

With Warmest Regards,

Nina Pesante, MD