

December 2007

Greetings:

When I sat down to write this year's letter, I pulled out and perused what I had written last December. I was impressed by my long and passionate discussion about functional medicine, one of my favorite topics. (The website is Functionalmedicine.org) After reading my prose, I asked myself why that excitement and passion felt so far away. As I mentally replayed the past twelve months, I had an "ah ha" moment! I had been quite happily occupied with my functional medicine studies until June. My landlord then stated he was READY to start my office renovation. I now realize the year seemed to fall into two phases -- pre and post-June.

In the "pre-June" half of the year, as planned, I took the Natural Medicine textbook (which weighs seven pounds) on my trips and read much of Volume 1. In May, I also attended a week-long functional medicine symposium on Adrenals and Thyroid. I thought it was spectacular! I have been to many conferences in the last twenty years. This symposium was the most intellectually challenging and uplifting medical educational event I have ever had the privilege of attending. What I learned has helped me to improve how I practice psychiatry.

With the clarity of hindsight, I can discern how and why I became swept up in the "post-June" remodeling process. To think through the design questions and then specify the actual choices demanded extensive time and energy. I had to work with and, worse yet, through my landlord. He was both the "customer" (because he paid most of the renovation bills) and the "contractor". I was the other "customer". This was not a very good combination for me. He was busy with his full-time job, family obligations, and extensive traveling. If you have ever been involved with remodeling, building, or are in the business, I need say no more.

When I first rented the office back in 1994, I "inherited" the office décor and layout. I was very naïve and thought I had to sign a lease as is or pay vast sums to make changes. I certainly did not know that rental space could be remodeled as part of a lease agreement. Since I was still in debt from medical school, I chose to have lower start up costs so I could concentrate on building a quality practice. I have observed that when some individuals begin to worry about being unable to pay large office bills, these fears can result in an unfortunate compromise in their values.

As I attempted to articulate to others and myself how I wanted to change the office, I discovered numerous inner conflicts. One arena of inner conflict appeared in the waiting room area. My fundamental intent was to create an "oasis" of sorts; a space in which one might have an opportunity to transition from the outside world before entering your own "inner world" in session. To me, an "oasis" requires both auditory and visual privacy. It must offer a calm, clean, and safe environment.

Once I prioritized my requirements for the "oasis", it was necessary to decide upon the appropriate building materials. An example of a specific decision that reified my inner conflict appeared in the significant difficulty I had in selecting the flooring for the waiting room. I quickly discovered I had complex and contradictory requirements. To me, a wood floor feels like stability and integrity, but it can be noisy and doesn't wear well in an office setting without significant maintenance. Carpet is quiet and can be visually calming, however, the carpets I liked best tended to rapidly show wear in a commercial application. To me, a significantly stained and worn carpet is not calming to the mind. At one point, I was briefly tempted to hire a professional decorator to bypass my struggles. I thought about it realistically and realized that I would still have to make design choices. I would also have the personal responsibility of hiring someone, conveying my wishes, and guess what -- the outcome -- not to mention adding yet another set of meetings, telephone calls, and additional deadlines to my life. After all these considerations, I chose not to hire a professional.

Well, I decided on having carpet installed. I am consistently amazed and awed that changing one design element can vastly alter the rest of the composition. In a similar vein, I am vibrantly aware that changing an element of one's life be it a job, home, pet, mate, diet, budget, etc., can result in a ripple effect throwing multiple other life choices into imbalance. I am enjoying the literal and spiritual challenge of the process of allowing the waiting room "oasis" to evolve. I continue to persist in finishing the remodeling given the profound limitations of working with my landlord. I must say that these endeavors have provided me with extensive, continuing personal growth challenges: letting go of the fantasy of absolute control, not taking events personally, staying mindful of my temperament and assumptions about others, keeping my eye on my true priorities, and working to be more impeccable with my words, and so on.

Recently, I have been suggesting the Ultra Simple Diet by Dr. Mark Hyman. I am using it for two reasons. First, as a structured, healthful one week detoxification protocol, as the book was written to be. Second, I am employing it as a means, within a specific context, to introduce functional medicine to you. I am bemused by the inertia and fear we humans face when trying to heal; this upsurge in emotions seems evident in myriad examples. One I see clearly is manifested in the emotions you have shared with me about reading and/or contemplating trying the Ultra Simple Diet. We often are moved to make a change motivated by pain or despair. The work required to learn and implement can seem daunting and the outcome dubious.

What we seem to forget is how amazing and irreplaceable it is to feel well. Feeling vital is a powerful motivator, especially when you have forgotten the experience; not the idea but the sensory experience. The parallel here is to ask yourself if you can taste cinnamon vividly right at this moment. You might have thoughts and words to describe a cinnamon moment, but you cannot taste cinnamon in the way that you can when it is on your tongue! The experience of cinnamon is much more than a memory or an idea. If you have never "tasted" vitality, it can seem like a myth.

If you have pain, curiosity, or seek adventure, I think that trying the Ultra Simple Diet for one week can yield benefits. Naturally, I do not think this week-long detoxification is wise for everyone or THE answer – without difficulty or flaw. But with those caveats, I recommend it.

Thank you in advance for filling out and returning the enclosed annual patient information form which allows me to keep my records up to date. Please mail or fax the page back to me. If you joined my practice within the last twelve months and there are no changes in your name, address, or phone number(s), you do not need to return the form this year.

With Warmest Regards,

Nina Pesante, MD