

Holistic Medicine - Rodd Stockwell, MD
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Autobiographical Statement – March 2006

My story begins after I completed my undergraduate degree at Harvard University. At that time I began teaching self defense in an intensive full-contact training program called Impact. There I saw students undergo a profound transformation. One woman, Susan, came to the program having been raped and physically abused for most of her life. It was clear on the first day that she was terrified to stand up on the mat while a mock assailant walked toward her. All she had to do to stop him in the exercise was to say “no” in a loud voice. Instead she couldn’t say a word, shrank back, and began to weep. During the course she was asked repeatedly to find the courage within herself to step back onto the mat and face her fears. And, she began to have more and more successes. By the end of the program she could use both her loud voice and her strong body to repel any attacker and she knew it. She had learned that she could keep herself safe, and at the graduation ceremony she walked upright, met each person’s eyes, and expressed her gratitude. The fear that she had carried with her for many years was gone and in its place was self-confidence. This was my introduction to healing.

A few years later I enrolled in medical school, which was followed by a family medicine residency. After graduating I worked as residency faculty at The Greater Lawrence Family Health Center for two years.

However, from the beginning, I pursued two paths simultaneously. While going through the predetermined steps required to become a board certified physician, I pursued a non-linear path in alternative healing modalities. My interest in martial arts led me to eastern healing systems including Traditional Chinese Medicine. I explored movement in its many forms and took a year’s leave from medical school to study eurhythm. Eurhythm is an artistic, pedagogical and therapeutic system of movement. It originates with a philosophy known as anthroposophy. This led me to study anthroposophically-extended medicine, spirituality, and energy medicine. I grew familiar with how alternative practitioners relate to one another and to their patients.

While in residency I began to experiment with combining the conventional and alternative medicine I had studied. To begin with, I would recommend that patients track their symptoms to better understand what triggered them. Together we would look at the patterns and find relationships to food, work exposures, or familial patterns, and we would discuss how much control they could exert over their circumstances. I learned how complicated health and wellness really are.

Once I finished my conventional training I looked for ways to integrate my diverse medical skills and interests. I studied mind/body medicine and homeopathy. I soon found the format of a large group practice to be restrictive.

In 2003 I started my own practice where I incorporate the full range of holistically oriented therapies I know. My practice is gratifying in both its depth and its breadth. One of the exciting elements is choosing which modality to use for a particular patient, according to personality and diagnosis. I have found homeopathic remedies to be very helpful for asthmatics and persons with gastrointestinal disease. Mind-body medicine has provided tools to help me educate my patients so they see how particular attitudes and habits influence their health problems. My knowledge of nutrition is something of interest to many patients, but I have learned that only slow gradual changes in eating are sustainable. Despite these patterns, I have been struck that I have the greatest success when I am most individual in my recommendations to patients.

Today I looked across my office at Marie. She has Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Syndrome and is facing an arduous healing process in order to rejoin the day-to-day world. I ask myself: "What can I do for this person today?" I know my biochemical understanding of physiology is essential in comprehending her condition, but I also know that each of the other paradigms has something relevant for the task at hand. I look deeply into her words, symptoms, and behaviors to see where she is stuck. What will I say to her and what treatments will I utilize--to help her unlock her potential and become the strong woman I know she can be.

My commitment to practice holistic medicine has strengthened as I experienced two things which surprised me. One of them is that I am happier. I enjoy using my intuition and my ability to relate to patients as people along with my expertise in alternative and conventional medical treatments. The other observation which surprised me is that patients do better with holistic care. Once given more tools, they are empowered to heal themselves. And, if they truly want to, they usually succeed.