

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Dedicated to increasing knowledge about safe and effective complementary and integrative medicine approaches.

The Healing Process in Integrative Medicine

By Carol Greco, PhD

What is healing?

How can you be an active participant in your own healing and health?

At the Center for Integrative Medicine, patients are often seeking relief of pain and suffering, or an improved sense of well-being. Many wish to restore their health and to heal.

Healing is a complex process involving “physical, mental, social, and spiritual processes of recovery, repair, renewal and transformation that increases wholeness, and often (though not invariably), order and coherence” (Dossey 2003). Healing may or may not involve the ‘cure’ of a disease.

Integrative medicine practitioners embrace a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of healing. However, healing is not a simple process. Certainly the healthcare provider plays an important role and she or he must have knowledge and skills. But healing also is interactive. Ideally there is a partnership between the patient and the provider, with each working toward the same goal of optimal wellbeing.

Researchers at the Center were curious. What factors set the stage for the best healing possible?

We asked groups of patients to give their opinions about healing factors. Some patients were from the Center for Integrative Medicine and some were from conventional medicine clinics in Pittsburgh. We asked, “what characteristics are most helpful in a healthcare provider?” We also asked, “How can you, as a patient, have a positive impact on your own healing?”

How does the healthcare provider contribute to healing?

One of the most frequently reported ideas was that the best healthcare providers show empathy and an

understanding of their patients’ lives and circumstances. Along with showing respect for their patients, the most helpful providers are confident and have solid expertise. These qualities were mentioned by conventional medicine patients as well as integrative medicine patients. However, not everyone wanted the same kind of connection. One patient commented, “I want the doctor to be professional, I kind of want him to speak in an articulate way, and you know, just—present an air of competence and intelligence, I really don’t need him to be my friend.” Others felt that friendliness and warmth were important. Another patient said, “I tend to like to have someone who’s sort of nurturing and that I can talk to.” The value of a partnership was also highlighted by a patient who said “I really like that she and I are like a team...working to make me better.”

How can patients contribute to their own healing?

In our interviews, patients acknowledged the importance of their own optimism, patience, and ability to take an active role in their health. Taking an active role can mean many things. Examples include, asking questions, coming to an appointment with a list of the most important areas to address, and really following through on the provider’s recommendations. Perhaps the most important factor in health and healing is living the lifestyle of a healthy person – keeping active physically and mentally, enjoying friends and family, and moving toward healthy eating.

Are there key features of the healthcare environment that can promote healing?

Our patient focus groups were very clear. The offices must be clean! A friendly and welcoming staff, and a restful, professional atmosphere are also important for making patients feel comfortable.

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Here is a list of things you can do to promote your own health and healing as you move forward:

- Be prepared. Come to your appointment with your WIN list (What's Important Now)
- Figure out what kind of patient-provider connection is right for you – and take responsibility for finding a like-minded provider to work with.
- Carefully talk over the treatment recommendations and make sure you agree.
- Once you have settled on a plan of action with your provider, follow through.
- Be optimistic and expect the best from yourself, your provider, and the treatment.

References:

1. Dossey L. (2003) Samueli conference on definitions and standards in healing research: working definitions and terms. Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, v9 no. 3, pp. A10-A12.
2. Greco CM, Glick RM, Morone NE, Schneider MJ (2013) Addressing the “It’s Just Placebo” Pitfall in CAM: Methodology of a Project to Develop Patient-Reported Measures of Nonspecific Factors in Healing. Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine. Article ID 613797

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The Center for Integrative Medicine at UPMC Shadyside is a hospital-based center in Pittsburgh that combines natural healing practices with conventional medicine. “Integrative medicine” refers to the incorporation of evidence-based complementary therapies into conventional treatments for patients. Integrative medicine is meant to work in conjunction with traditional medicine, providing a more holistic approach to healing — mind, body, and spirit.

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Research Opportunities

HEAL Study

When you work with a healthcare provider, what contributes to improved health?

Is it the attitudes and behaviors of the patient? The expertise and caring of the healthcare provider? Is it acupuncture needles? Medications? Or some combination of all of these?

Center for Integrative Medicine researchers Carol Greco, PhD; Ronald Glick, MD; Michael Schneider, DC, PhD, and their team are hoping, with your help, to learn more about the important factors that help people to heal. The University of Pittsburgh has received funding from the National Institutes of Health-National Centers for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, to study patients' ideas about what helps them to improve their health. The overall goal of the **HEAL Study**, is to develop and test questionnaires to measure the important contextual factors in treatment from the patient's perspective.

Who can participate in the HEAL Study?

People with back pain or neck pain who receive services at the Center for Integrative Medicine may be eligible to participate if they:

- are starting treatment at the Center for Integrative Medicine.
- expect to continue the treatment with their CIM provider for at least several weeks.
- are able to read and understand English.
- are willing and able to complete questionnaires on a computer.

Participants will be asked to complete computer-based questionnaires regarding their attitudes and opinions about their healthcare. Each of three sessions will require 30 minutes to 1 hour. The computer assessments will take place approximately one month apart and can be completed at CIM or at any location with internet access. Participants will be paid up to \$100.

For more information please call 412-623-2374

Do you have spinal stenosis in your lower back?

If you do, you may be eligible to participate in a University of Pittsburgh research study on lumbar spinal stenosis, or arthritis of the spine. Many people with stenosis complain of weakness and pain in their legs while walking. Our study wants to compare the effectiveness of three nonsurgical approaches for reducing these symptoms.

You must:

- Be 60+ years of age.
- Have been diagnosed with lumbar spinal stenosis confirmed by imaging (CT or MRI).
- Currently have difficulty walking, but be able to walk at least 50 feet without a cane or walker.
- Be able to participate in mild exercise.

If eligible, you will be randomly assigned (like flipping a coin) to one of three groups:

Group 1: Standard medical care

- ◆ Three office visits with a medical doctor over a six-week period at UPMC Shadyside Center for Integrative Medicine.

Group 2: Community-based exercise

- ◆ Two exercise classes per week for six weeks at the JCC Squirrel Hill or the Vintage East Liberty.

Group 3: Clinic-based manual therapy

- ◆ Two sessions per week for six weeks with a physical therapist or chiropractor at the University of Pittsburgh Department of Physical Therapy in Oakland.



For more information please call 412-623-1714

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2014 Lectures and Classes at the UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

August 2014

Mon. 8/18—8/25	3:30-5:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 2 (2 classes)	\$25	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Mon. 8/18—8/25	6:00-7:30 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (2 classes)	\$25	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Wed. 8/20—8/27	5:30-7:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (2 classes)	\$25	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Tues. 8/26	7:00-8:00 p.m.	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Orientation	FREE	Carol M. Greco, Ph.D.
Thurs. 8/28	5:30-6:30 p.m.	The Many Health Benefits of Tai Chi	FREE	Tom Mihok

September 2014

Tues. 9/2—11/4	5:30-6:30 p.m.	Tai Chi (10 Classes)	\$100	Tom Mihok
Tuesday 9/2—10/7	12:00-1:00 p.m.	Beginner's Yoga (6 Classes)	\$55	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Mon. 9/8—9/29	3:30-5:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 2 (4 classes)	\$50	Alicja Walczak, MS, CRS
Mon. 9/8—9/29	6:00-7:30 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (4 classes)	\$50	Alicja Walczak, MS, CRS
Wed. 9/10—10/1	5:30-7:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (4 classes)	\$50	Alicja Walczak, MS, CRS
Tues. 9/9—10/28	6:30-8:30 p.m.	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (8 classes)	\$300	Carol M. Greco, Ph.D.
Wed. 9/24—11/12	12:00-1:30 p.m.	Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (8 classes)		Dinnie Goldring, LCSW
Thurs. 9/18	5:30-6:30 p.m.	Every BODY Deserves Massage	FREE	Jessie Violet Larson, LMT

October 2014

Mon. 10/6—10/27	3:30-5:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 2 (4 classes)	\$50	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Mon. 10/6—10/27	6:00-7:30 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (4 classes)	\$50	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Wed. 10/8—10/29	5:30-7:00 p.m.	Yoga Level 1 (4 classes)	\$50	Deanna L. Burkett, MA, MS
Thurs. 10/9—10/30	5:30-7:00 p.m.	Food for Life: Nutrition and Cooking (4 classes)	\$75	Janet McKee, Board Certified Holistic Health Counselor
Thurs. 10/18	5:30-6:30 p.m.	Shiatsu for Hard-working Hands	FREE	Kate Sherman, MSCP

November 2014

Thurs. 11/20	5:30-6:30 p.m.	Healthy Aging	FREE	Sari Cohen, ND
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