

## Integrative Healthcare

A patient centered and wellness-based approach to optimize health.

### **Susan Koepp**

Certified Yoga Teacher/Therapist

Nurse Practitioner, Partners in Health, PC



It is well documented that patient centered medical care encourages a comprehensive approach to wellness. It is absolutely imperative that patients are empowered to make choices about their healthcare that are in their best interest. This is accomplished through education, involvement and mutual respect.

“Tell me and I forget,

Teach me and I learn,

Involve me and I remember.” Benjamin Franklin

The current medical model is largely illness-based. A patient presents with symptoms, a diagnosis is made and a treatment prescribed. This approach works well in an emergency, an accident with multiple injuries, treatment of a heart attack or stroke, or a coma that has been caused by uncontrolled blood sugar. There are countless advances in science and medicine and in the delivery of medical and surgical emergency care. We are fortunate to have this expertise available to us in our major medical centers and hospitals. However the current medical model does not adequately address the prevention of illness and chronic disease. Why is it that while cholesterol reducing prescription medication, (“statins”) have been aggressively prescribed over the last 20 years to “prevent” heart disease, yet heart disease tops the list as the number one cause of death of men and women in this country? There is more to the picture – we are not just a bunch of numbers. We are a whole person inclusive of mind, body and spirit.

The philosophy of integrative medicine embraces treating the whole person, not just an illness or disease. Integrative medicine combines conventional Western medicine with complementary or alternative health modalities that will promote

wellness and prevent disease. Effective communication is a key component to a successful relationship between patients and their healthcare providers.

Inquiry and discussion of lifestyle and belief systems promote an effective healthcare partnership. For instance, there are people who believe that if they take medicine to reduce their cholesterol they are healthy. They say, “The medicine controls my cholesterol so it’s okay to eat whatever I want” or “I just had a check up and was told my cholesterol is normal and to stay on my medicine”. Visit after visit, there is a false sense that all’s well and patients give no consideration to improving their nutrition or exercise. Often busy providers with time constraints don’t enforce lifestyle changes as maintenance for good health. It is simply quicker and easier to write a prescription.

Use of medications (if necessary) to reduce cholesterol levels is only a part of the integrative treatment plan for someone at risk for heart disease. According to Mark Hyman, M.D., author of *The Ultramind Solution* (Scribner), “You can’t prevent or treat heart disease without addressing the real causes: poor diet, stress, environmental toxins and a sedentary lifestyle.” Many people are prescribed medications without proper nutrition counseling or an adequate trial to improve their cholesterol with diet and exercise. On the other hand, I have encountered patients that have made significant lifestyle changes but never inquired about reducing a dose of medicine or discontinuing it all together. With careful monitoring and professional guidance it is entirely possible to stop some medications! It is of paramount importance to continually encourage lifestyle changes. An integrative plan may also include recommendations for meditation or yoga as a therapeutic approach to reducing risk factors for disease. With proper coaching, deep breathing techniques employed in some integrative practices have proven time and time again to lower blood pressure; now what could be more effective and economical than simply taking a mindful breath? In addition, a provider who plays an integrative role is usually more versed in the proper use of nutraceuticals and supplements which enables them to guide their use by patients.

Integrative practices are becoming more available largely because patients are seeking different approaches to healthcare. Many conventional medical schools are adding alternative/complementary and integrative studies to their curriculum. When patients are engaged in their healthcare they are more compliant with whatever modalities are utilized. It is after all an individual's responsibility to protect their most vital asset – their health. How vested are you?

Susan Koepp serves on the board of the North Carolina Integrative Medical Society, [www.NCIMS.com](http://www.NCIMS.com). Partners in Health, P.C. is an advanced nursing practice owned by Ms. Koepp and is located at 1101 Broad Street in Oriental. The practice allows her to share over 30 years of experience and combines the best of conventional and integrative healthcare. They are accepting new patients; for a consult/appointment call 249-2220.