

Living with Intention

We've been fooled! All of us. You see, the popular belief is that the body is fundamentally flawed, subject to degeneration at any moment, always on the verge of mortal disease and in need of continual monitoring and support by health professionals.

by Stephan Esser, M.D.

Celebrating Health

There is a public preoccupation with disease that is assuming a dimension of national obsession. Doctor visits to your "health provider" (a misnomer indeed) and pharmacy are more common than dinner dates and social outings on many baby-boomer's calendars. Every mail brings word of the imminent perils posed by diabetes, heart disease, asthma, cancer, arthritis, hypertension and the like. There is regrettably no discernible counter propaganda. No agencies exist for the celebration of the plain fact that the human body, when placed within the constructs of a health-engendering lifestyle and environment, is in fact abundantly healthy! How often have you received mail touting the fact that the heart beats faithfully uninterrupted and the kidneys, liver and spleen purify and renew our blood 24/7, 365 days of 70-80+ years with very limited dysfunction? When was the last flyer you read or television commercial you saw which lauded the healing potential of your body which continues without your acknowledgement or affirmation? The body is spectacular! Unfortunately the manner in which we treat it is often far less superb.

We subject our body to "inhumane" levels of stress both internally and externally. Each day we present it with a constant barrage of adulterated foods, unresolved emotional tensions and less than ideal resting patterns creating a truly "toxic" environment. Yet despite our best efforts to undermine its intentions, the body is frequently able to sustain a very high caliber of health for 40-50 years before the constant abuse has taken a toll and the body expresses dysfunction in the form of some disease or another. At that point in time we are prescribed some agent or are told we are deficient in a micronutrient from the Amazon. We are given an ACE Inhibitor for blood pressure, perhaps, or glyburide for our elevated blood sugars by our well-intentioned physician. On the other hand, our friendly health food clerk may encourage us to choose "green allopathy" instead and he gives us red yeast rice for our cholesterol and butter-bur for our chronic headaches. These treatments may certainly benefit our symptoms but they fail to address the root cause of most disease. Now don't get me wrong. The use of pharmacologic and surgical interventions have a place in our lives, as do at times the use of natural supplementation and micronutrient rich super foods. However with 4 of 10 healthcare dollars spent to treat metabolic syndrome (↑ BP, Lipids, Glucose) it is apparent that our dollars could be more wisely spent.

Diseases of Choice

So why do we frequently err toward poor lifestyle choices and thus increase our burden of disease? What distracts our attention from the foundational tenets of good health? Why do even the most committed Hygienists at times overcomplicate the simple elegance of our message? I believe it is due to the fact that many of our ills are “diseases of choice.” But this is a hard message to swallow. To suggest that we make choices which directly impact our own health is to place responsibility squarely onto our shoulders. It is at the same time empowering and confrontational. Taking responsibility often requires admission of “fault” and a humble progression toward change — a hard path indeed. As anthropologist Barbara Goodfield wrote, “There is something distasteful in the sight of a highly developed society being forced to divert great resources, both financial and intellectual, to the cure of its own self-inflicted diseases. We can characterize these as diseases of choice — those which arise from excesses in its lifestyle, or the pollution of its environment.” (Goodfield, 1977). It is indeed far more palatable for the average individual to believe that his or her ailments are due to old age, genetic misfortune or some mysterious cause beyond personal control. This “no-fault” approach to health care has become ubiquitous and has promoted further excesses while disenfranchising many people. Time and again I meet patients informed by their doctors that there is nothing they can do to help their diseases except take medications faithfully and get regular check-ups. This mentality robs the patient of involvement and sidelines him or her as a mere spectator at a time when he/she needs more than ever to be an active, thinking member of the health care team.

Living with Intention

How can we joyously embrace the task of living well despite our own human foibles? I believe that we must first live with awareness and intention. If we are not aware of our actions, we can never change them. We must wake up every day with the intention to be healthy, joyful and involved and be aware of how our actions impact our own lives and the collective world around us. We must recommit ourselves to these good intentions daily. If our goal is to be as healthy as possible and thereby to live the most fulfilling, vibrant life possible we will slowly root out the causes of illness most amenable to change in our lives. Do we tend toward excess calories or frequent trips to the ice cream shop? Do we spend too much time at the local watering hole or the cinema and not enough in bed rejuvenating? Do we shy away from the “pain” and soreness we experience at the gym or on our daily constitutional walk? Do we have unresolved personal relationships distorting our perception of self and others? Do we limit our



own potential by assuming that the spare tire around the midsection is part of our wardrobe and not a result of our caloric consumption? If our intention is to be not just well but “excellent,” then we must maximize the potential of the actions under our control. By waking with intention and becoming more aware of how our actions impact personal and global health, we can effectively impact the course of our own health and the heritage we will leave the world. Will we live a life of health, beauty, joy and compassion or will ours be one of dysfunction, disinterest and disharmony? Will our heritage be one which future generations celebrate or denigrate? Every day we shape our health, define our future and inscribe our heritage for the next seven generations. Though we can never be perfect, we can always strive for a more perfect and harmonious life. Let’s make that our goal as we eat, sleep, play and love with awareness and intention!

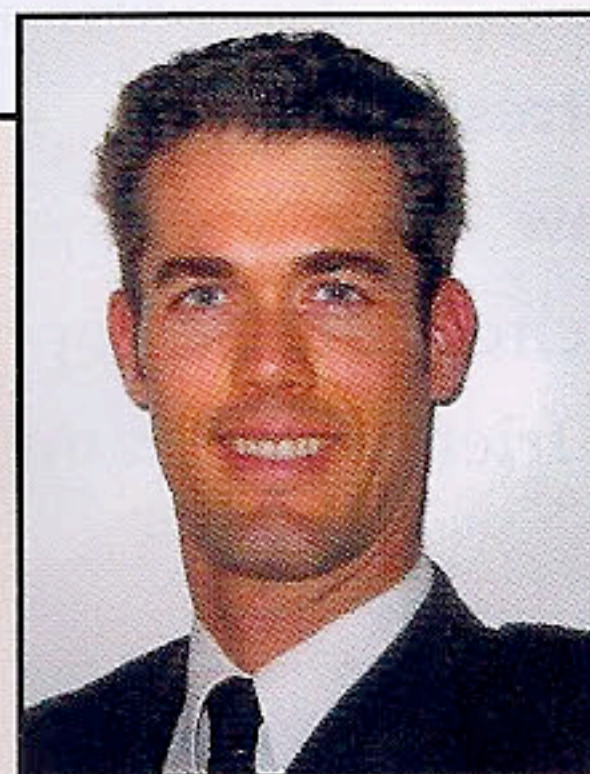
Questions to Assist

What are three words that define me? What are my intentions for today, tomorrow, etc.? How do I perceive myself? How do others perceive me? (i.e.: healthy, sick, competent, compassionate, lazy, friendly) How do I want to be seen? What will my gift be to future generations? Have I maximized the tools of a Natural Hygienic lifestyle? Use the Lifestyle Survey on the next page to help identify areas for personal growth.

References

Goodfield, J. “Humanity in Science: A perspective and a plea.” *Science*, 1977, 112, 102-103.

Medco Health Solutions (figure on 4 of 10 medications dollars spent on Metabolic Syndrome)



Stephan Esser, M.D., recently completed his medical education at the University of South Florida College of Medicine in Tampa, Florida. He will be completing residency training at Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts.