

Time for an Integrated Practice?

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Let's pretend for a moment that you are not a health care provider, but the average health care consumer. Generally speaking, as an average consumer, you've heard a lot about nutrition, have some concerns about drugs and are willing to live a healthy lifestyle if someone will help you sort it all out. One of the things that frustrates you the most (as an average consumer) is that the information you are hearing from the media does not match what you are being told by your medical doctor. You are convinced that you have choices on your road to improving and maintaining your health, but most of the choices your MD gives you tend to be drug-related. Ultimately, you (again, as a consumer) want the best of all health disciplines. You want to feel great, look great and live forever.

Now, with that attitude firmly in your mind, mentally walk into your office and take a good look at your practice. Ask yourself these questions: What percentage of the average consumer's health needs are you ready to address? Would the average consumer classify you as a specialist or a generalist? Are you really ready to answer questions and provide recommendations about diet, nutrition and overall health? Are you part of a defined team of providers that work together to co-manage your patient?

Today's health care consumers are better informed and much more demanding than they used to be. They want answers as well as care. Sometimes, they want answers before receiving care, and this trend is sure to continue.

There has been another interesting trend in our chiropractic colleges as they, like you, seek to address the health needs of our society. A surprising number has expanded their educational portfolio to include other health care disciplines. For example, National University of Health Sciences, Northwestern Health Sciences University, Southern California University of Health Sciences, New York Chiropractic College, Parker College of Chiropractic and Western States Chiropractic College have all added programs in massage therapy and/or acupuncture in recent years.

With the expected [decrease in primary care medical physicians over the next several years](#), you may want to rethink your practice approach.¹ In particular, you may want to consider [adding services](#), [adding other providers or even joining an integrated practice that can address a larger percentage of your patients' needs](#).

Spend the next couple of weeks talking to your patients about their needs. Put together a list of services you could add and see what they are using now with other providers, or would be interested in if you made those services available.

At the very least, ask your patients about massage therapy, acupuncture, nutrition, herbs, weight loss, high blood pressure, etc. The direction you take with your practice will be dependent upon your practice philosophy and location. You will probably need to think outside of the box a bit before you rule anything out. If you see that patients are interested in additional services, there are different ways you can address those interests.

The mere exercise of polling your patients will open your thinking to what the people in your community expect from their health care providers. Information like this will help you make better choices, whatever your course of action. It's all about being open to change. The health care landscape is changing and we need to respond accordingly.

Reference

1. Petersen D. [A golden opportunity in primary care](#). *Dynamic Chiropractic*, Jan. 15, 2009.

FEBRUARY 2009