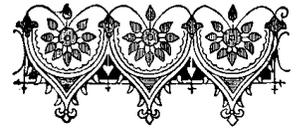


# Health & Medicine



## Fixing the Broken Medical System



Dr. Kate Thomsen and Silky

"It ain't what it used to be" is what you hear from older doctors who were in practice before the days of managed pharmaceutical medicine. My primary mentor is deceased but I remember his frustration with the growing constraints that the practice of modern medicine began placing on the art of compassionate patient care. It is frustrating to be a patient too. In your ten minutes of doctor time, you never feel like you have the chance to explain your whole story, that no one had a chance to really figure out why you are feeling the way you do and you always seem to come away with yet another drug. It is reported that at any given time an elderly patient will be taking, on average, four or five prescription drugs and two over-the-counter (OTC) medications. The estimated incidence of drug interactions rises from 6% in patients taking two medications a day to as high as 50% in patients taking five a day. Complicating the quick fix picture, today's medicine is practiced in 'silos' with each part of the body relegated to a different specialist. Today's medicine is so high tech and complicated that physicians need to break it down into manageable pieces but it leaves the concept of treating the whole person an impossibility. The system is broken. It is financially and spiritually broken

and neither patients nor physicians are happy.

We need a new model of health care. As the population ages, we are seeing more chronic disease and there are no models in the current system for treating chronic disease. Surgery and pharmaceuticals are indicated for acute care and short term use. These modalities do not account for a person's unique genetic make-up or their environmental influences such as diet/lifestyle/toxin exposure which have a more direct influence on the rise of chronic disease in modern western society. Enter Functional Medicine: Founded by the distinguished nutritional biochemist, Dr. Jeffery Bland in 1990, the concept of functional medicine was to join the progress in basic medical science/research with clinical medicine to address the growing problems associated with chronic disease. He and his wife funded the educational arm, The Institute for Functional Medicine, to teach "a system biology approach to the prevention and management of chronic disease utilizing the appropriate facets of nutrition, lifestyle, exercise environment, structural, cognitive, emotional and pharmaceutical therapies to meet the individual needs of the patient." Over the years these six principles have guided the Functional Medicine movement:

- Biochemical individuality of each patient (each patient is unique)
- Patient centered vs. disease oriented care (It is more important to know what patient has the disease than to know what disease the patient has)
- Dynamic balance between internal and external factors

- Web like connections of physiological factors in the body (the body acts more like an orchestra than independent instruments)

- Health as a positive vitality (health is not merely the absence of disease)

- Promotion of organ reserve (prevention and healthy lifestyles enhance your health span).

Functional Medicine teaches that core clinical imbalances lie at the heart of a disease condition. A patient's history of chronic disease is evaluated through the lens of seven systems in the functional medicine matrix. These are:

- Hormonal and neurotransmitter imbalances
- Oxidation-reduction imbalances and mitochondrial dysfunction
- Detoxification and bio-transformational imbalances
- Immune imbalances
- Inflammatory imbalances
- Digestive, absorptive, and microbiological imbalances
- Structural imbalances from cellular membrane function to musculoskeletal system

In this way, it becomes less important to identify the disease and the drugs to treat it than if does to identify the underlying mechanisms that started the process and those that are keeping it going. It is then possible to intervene at multiple levels to address the core clinical imbalances and to restore a patient's functionality and health.

Our current medical model needs changing and the growing Functional Medicine movement is part of the solution. In February, Dr. Jeffery Bland was among a group of leaders in the field of integrative medicine participating in a landmark sum-

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mit held by the prestigious Institute of Medicine. He recently contributed testimony on the future of health care reform to the Senate Committee on Health Education, Labor and Pensions. At the hearing, the chair of the committee, Senator Tom Harkin said, "Our present health care system is unsustainable. We must introduce a pervasive culture of wellness."

I am proud to be a long-standing member of the Institute for Functional Medicine and excited to be going to our 18th International Symposium in May. It is always inspiring!!!

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*Dr. Kate Thomsen has a holistic health practice in Pennington, NJ. She is board certified in Family Medicine and in Integrative/Holistic Medicine. For more information see [www.drkatethomsen.com](http://www.drkatethomsen.com). For an appointment or an upcoming detoxification program call the office at 609-818-9700.*

