Abstract

The integration of body, mind, and spirit has become a key dimension of health education and disease prevention and treatment; however, our health care system remains primarily disease centered. Finding simple steps to help each of us find our own balance can improve our lives, our work, and our relationships. On the basis of interviews with health care experts at the leading edge of the new model of medicine, this article identifies simple tools to improve the health of patients and caregivers.

Great strides have been made in the study of whole person health care. The integration of body, mind, and spirit has become a key dimension of health education and disease prevention and treatment. Despite many advances in a wide range of holistic approaches, however, our health care system remains primarily disease-centered rather than focusing on the well-being of the whole person. To thrive as individuals and as communities of caring, we are called on to develop an appreciation both for the inner wisdom derived from direct personal experiences of illness and health (those of health care professionals and patients) and for scientific and technologic developments that may promote health and well-being. To gain insight into some of the basic tools of whole person health care, a series of interviews were conducted with health care experts who are at the leading edge of the new model of medicine (see Sidebar: Whole Person Health Care Classes from the Institute of Noetic Sciences). We summarize their comments as a series of simple tools that may be useful to you in your personal life and work.*

1. Examine Your Worldview. As you consider your work and the range of patients you treat, it is clear that each of us has a unique worldview, belief system, and way of understanding that promotes whole person health. A worldview is a lens of perception through which we see everything. As a health care practitioner, you bring your own beliefs and assumptions to patient care. Diverse healing practices and approaches to wellness can add to the richness of the health care process, but they can also add complexity if different approaches conflict in the course of a treatment plan. Bringing awareness to these worldviews—your own and those of others—can aid you in your collaboration with coworkers and communication with patients, many of whom may hold a different view of health and healing. Stop long enough to reflect on your worldview, beliefs, stereotypes, and assumptions. How might they be limiting you or holding you back? How might they offer new ways to communicate with patients from diverse social and cultural backgrounds?

2. Take an Integral Perspective. The integral model is based on an intuitive understanding of life and reality as an undivided whole. Seeing yourself and your patients as social, emotional, physical, and spiritual beings can allow for effective and meaningful communication that promotes healing and therapeutic relationships. As a pioneer in holistic nursing and cofounder of the American Holistic Nurses Association, Barbara Dossey, PhD, RN, noted, “An integral process is defined as a comprehensive way to organize multiple phenomena of human experience and reality from four perspectives: 1) the individual interior that includes personal and intentional dimensions; 2) the individual exterior, including behavioral and physiological dimensions; 3) [the] collective interior, such as shared cultural meaning; and 4) the collective exterior, that involves the structures and systems in which health care operates … Moving beyond fragmentation, this integral view allows for a greater awareness of the complexities of human nature and healing.”

3. Develop Healing Relationships. As a health practitioner, you are always in relationships, whether with patients, other practitioners, or yourself. As you enhance the relationship with yourself, you will find that growth and support in each of these partnerships fosters growth and vitality for all the others. Vitality can be enhanced by adopting any one of a variety of contemplative practices: meditation, prayer, or connecting with nature. As Lee Lipsenthal, MD, author of Finding Balance in a Medical Life, noted during an interview, “When we are in true partnership, that’s when real growth happens and that is success in health care.”

4. Healing Wisdom Comes Through Deep Listening. Informed by his passion for deep connections, Elliott Dacher, MD, a pioneer in emerging medicine, encourages engagement in the profound process of listening in the healing relationship. Developing these capacities, as a life practice, dramatically affects your ability to be present with another. In Dr Dacher’s words, “This level of presence and listening brings insight and wisdom to the healing environment.” This point is further developed by nurse educator Janet Quinn, PhD, RN, who emphasizes that “real healing
is about so much more than the elimination of our signs and symptoms of disease.  

5. **Cultivate Loving-kindness.** Many healing practitioners note that the greatest source of healing in the world is love. Human-to-human, heart-centered care is at the core of the healing relationship. Delivering care with loving-kindness may transform the health system. In the video, Jean Watson, PhD, RN, Professor of Nursing, reminds us that “caring in nursing is not just a job, but something to cherish.” Extending loving-kindness to oneself is as important as offering it to those you care for. Take a moment to define what loving-kindness means to you and identify the ways you may nurture the tenderness and compassion of love in your daily routine.

6. **Model Optimal Health.** Many experts have noted that nurses must come to work healthy to provide the best care for others. Each one of us possesses an inner knowledge of what we need to thrive and feel balanced, yet too often health care practitioners do not tend to their own needs. As Dr Dossey reminds us, “We want to be of service to health and healing, and this requires the integration of self-care in our own lives.”

7. **Develop a Support System.** Whether in proximal or virtual settings, connecting with others offers a way to live according to new patterns or behaviors. Find or create social networks that support your explorations. Working in teams, participating in peer-to-peer programs, developing common rituals and symbols to share across the staff, joining a journaling club, and participating in an Internet-based study group are but a few of many ways to connect, find support, and share interests with a view to whole person healing.

8. **Create Healing Rituals.** Habits for Healing is a program developed by Dr Quinn. She invites us to approach little things we do every day as opportunities for healing rituals. As a nurse or other health practitioner, you frequently wash your hands; one simple habit she suggests is to bless the person you have just cared for with mindfulness while the water is running and silently say “I release you” before caring for the next patient. This is a method for becoming fully present with each patient.

9. **Set Intentions for Optimal Healing.** Ask yourself, “What matters most? What values do I want to adhere to?” On the basis of these reflections, you can craft an intentionality statement so that when challenges and opportunities arise, you will have developed an inner compass with which to navigate and make more conscious life choices. As Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN, Founder and Director of the Center for Spirituality and Healing at the University of Minnesota, suggests, before engaging with a patient—whether listening, inserting an IV, changing a bedpan, or completing procedures—setting intentions increases one’s presence, attentiveness, and effectiveness. Using affirmations will reinforce the intention. This simple practice can provide you with a rich dimension of “highest-purpose healing.”

10. **Stay Informed.** The Internet is a great source of both information and confusion. Patients come to the health care environment with access to more information than ever before. Nurses become valuable coaches and guides helping the patient navigate through the Internet. Nurse educators Dr Watson and Dr Kreitzer recommend using the Internet to stay up-to-date and maintain a curious and open mindset toward your patients’ use of social media.

11. **Re-center Yourself Throughout the Day.** Remember to take a few deep breaths and center yourself in your own heart space. Dr Watson encourages the return to the heart

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**Whole Person Health Care Classes from the Institute of Noetic Sciences**

Through the generosity of a grant from the Deutsch Foundation and the Institute of Noetic Sciences, you have access to nine hours of engaging content, quizzes, and certificates that may be used for continuing education credits, at no cost. These classes are available from: [http://elearning.noetic.org/course/category.php?id=13](http://elearning.noetic.org/course/category.php?id=13).

The first time you take a class, you will need to create a username and password. Once you get to the class, you will be prompted to enter a password. In the video, Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, PhD, explores the future of health care, as it aims to incorporate all dimensions of healing, from physical to spiritual to ecological. Through the generosity of a grant from the Deutsch Foundation and the Institute of Noetic Sciences, you have access to nine hours of engaging content, quizzes, and certificates that may be used for continuing education credits, at no cost. These classes are available from: [http://elearning.noetic.org/course/category.php?id=13](http://elearning.noetic.org/course/category.php?id=13).

- **Consciousness and Healing: The Spiritual Dimension in the Integral Model,** with Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, PhD; Elliot Dacher, MD; and Janet F Quinn, PhD, RN, FAAN. The integral model for health and healing is discussed with specific emphasis on the spiritual dimension of health and wholeness.

- **On a Caritas Model of Caring Science,** with Jean Watson, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN. Learn how caring philosophy is used to guide transformative models of health care and healing practices for nurses and patients alike, in diverse settings worldwide.

- **On Creating Optimal Healing Environments,** with Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN. Consider the effectiveness of personal action to make changes in our current health care system and how those changes support the weaving of integrative practices with allopathic medicine into the fabric of health care.

- **Integral Healing,** with Lee Lipsenthal, MD. Delve into the new integral model of healing and learn how it represents the next step in health care, as it aims to incorporate all dimensions of healing, from physical to spiritual and ecological to cosmological.

- **On Therapeutic Touch, Habits for Healing, and Spiritual Inquiry,** with Janet F Quinn, PhD, RN, FAAN. Explore the ways whole person healing can be augmented with therapeutic touch and simple mindfulness practices incorporated into daily routines.

- **On Nightingale, Nursing, and Creating a Healthy World,** with Barbara Dossey, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN. Examine holistic nursing, compassionate care for the dying, and Florence Nightingale’s founding of the nursing profession.

- **The Integral Model: Answering the Call for Whole Systems Health Care,** with Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, PhD. Expand your understanding of health care and its future direction. Learn about the integral model and practical ways to apply it in clinical settings and everyday life.
of your practice—that sacred place within you where the impulse to serve as a health care practitioner originated. Offering gentle tenderness and open compassion can be the gift you first give yourself in order to offer compassionate, healing service to humankind. Nurturing this sensitivity to self can provide you with greater sensitivity toward others.

12. **Death Makes Life Possible.** Your role as a health and healing practitioner involves a reflection on your own views of death and what you believe happens afterward. There are many maps or worldviews of this matter, revealing a wide range of viewpoints. In considering them, people can find comfort and a set of possibilities for their understanding of their lives and their own mortality. Understanding your own worldview about death and the afterlife, as well as those of your patients, can ease the fear, anxiety, and suffering of all your patients, especially those that are approaching the end of life.9

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To access tools for creating healthy lifestyle goals, visit the University of Minnesota’s Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing Web site: [www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu).

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**References**


