

ENVIRONMENTAL HOME

Get a check-up for you and your home

By Dan Howard

For TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

If you are like me, the addition of another concept or term in the medical field can be unwelcome babble in an already confusing part of our lives.

Well, my apology, but I am going to add another term. Please hang with me, and it will make sense. This new approach might even save the life of someone you love.

“Functional medicine” is not a fad. Many of the nation’s foremost healthcare providers such as the Cleveland Clinic and the Cancer Centers of America are outstanding examples of nationally recognized programs utilizing functional medicine to improve the recovery and long-term health of patients.

The place to start the discussion of how medicine should evolve is to answer the question: Why does functional medicine matter? The answer lies with the fact that chronic diseases — diseases that linger in our lives — have become more and more prevalent. Auto-immune diseases, asthma, diabetes, arthritis, cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are examples of chronic diseases.

The secret to managing chronic disease is looking at the factors that most influence the course of the chronic disease: nutrition, lifestyle, genetics and environment.

Traditional treatment of patients is modeled for treating specific problems such as infections, heart attacks, broken bones and other afflictions that can be corrected with a heroic swoop down and medical intervention (often a medical miracle). The symptoms and episodes are treated, but the underlying causes are often ignored.

Functional medicine practitioners spend time with patients, consider their histories and look at possible interactions. They then look at the influence of genetic, lifestyle, nutrition and environmental factors that affect the long-term health of the patient. This is a much more



GETTY IMAGES

Functional medicine is a growing field that examines the interaction between a person’s environment and their health.

personalized or holistic approach to medicine and general health.

When the general health of a person is managed in functional medicine, the chronic conditions are better managed and acute episodes are reduced. The quality of life is improved in the long run. This approach gives patients the personal power to improve their own health.

Let’s face it. It is easy to give a COPD patient an inhaler and tank of air. It is more meaningful to get them to quit smoking and have their moldy house treated.

When the functional medicine practitioner is concerned about the environmental conditions affecting a patient’s health, environmental professionals test and report the findings to the patient and the medical practitioner. There are environmental specialists experienced at providing the proper testing and results required for the evaluation and interpretation of the medical provider.

Pittsburgh-area functional medicine practitioner Dr. Will Cole

describes the five principles of functional medicine as follows:

- Functional medicine views us all as being different; genetically and biochemically unique. This personalized health care treats the individual, not the disease. It supports the normal healing mechanisms of the body, naturally, rather than attacking disease directly.

- Functional medicine is deeply science based. The latest research shows us that what happens within us is connected in a complicated network or web of relationships. Understanding those relationships allows us to see deep into the functioning of the body.

- Your body is intelligent and has the capacity for self-regulation, which expresses itself through a dynamic balance of all your body systems.

- Your body has the ability to heal and prevent nearly all the diseases of aging.

- Health is not just the absence of disease but a state of immense

vitality.

Environmental professionals can play a role in your long-term health.

Any home, office, school or any other facility can be a hidden source of exposures affecting fundamental health.

Medical practitioners usually can’t follow you home to explore the set of exposures a patient experiences. Most homeowners are not able to identify and test for most environmental hazards that can affect health.

The role environmental professionals play in the functional medicine puzzle is identifying and solving the environmental issues that affect both long-term and short-term health. The testing for the wide range of causes of sick building syndrome is just like crime scene investigative work.

Some of the factors that can affect the long-term health of individuals can include:

- Mold & Allergens
- Lead

- Asbestos
- Formaldehyde
- Sewage bacteria
- Volatile organic compounds
- Carbon monoxide
- Latent pesticides and other stored chemicals
- Radon
- Rodent infestations

A general screening and assessment for these and other potential environmental risks can provide valuable information that can assist in maintaining patient health. Very often, functional medicine practitioners have tested patients and already identified sensitivities and exposures that are affecting the health of patients before the environmental professional is consulted.

Mold exposures are one of the most common examples of problems identified in patient medical testing. In that example, the goal of the medical practitioner would be to have the environmental professional identify the source of mold and its proper remediation.

The field of functional medicine takes a holistic approach to the patient to prevent disease and enable or enhance recovery. The world we live in is a major part of the puzzle that affects our health and the health of those we love.

Nutrition, lifestyle and environment are all important factors in our health. As we continue to consider our overall health, each of these areas will be considered in health care and recovery programs.

You will find links and information about functional medicine in the online copy of this article at: www.FunctionalMedicinePractice.info.

Dan Howard is the owner of EnviroSpect. For environmental consultation, call 724 443-6653. For more information visit their website at EnviroSpect.info. Email questions to DanielJHowardJr@gmail.com, and follow him on Facebook or via Twitter @DanHoward251.