

Health Care as a State of Self-Defense

By John Upledger, DO, OMM

I have a friend who was in a car accident not long ago. Brenda* was cruising down the road at 45 mph when another car suddenly crossed her path. By the time both vehicles crashed to a stop, Brenda's face had been slashed by an exploding air bag and her knees had slammed into the dashboard. She was quickly taken by ambulance to the emergency room of a local hospital.

When she arrived, her face was so swollen you couldn't quite tell what she looked like, and her knees resembled small cantaloupes. The doctors took x-rays, found no broken bones, and promptly sent her home with a prescription for painkillers and advice on how to wash her wounded face.

Fortunately, Brenda is married to a cranioSacral therapist who understood the full effect of such a serious impact to the soft tissues. He immediately began icing his wife's knees by the hour to help bring down the swelling. He gave her warm Epsom salt baths to decrease systemic muscle soreness, and he used his hands to gently release the tissues that had recoiled from such a strong blow.

By addressing the soft-tissue injuries as soon as possible, his chances of helping his wife avoid long-term, debilitating pain multiplied exponentially. Still, they were both sure they'd get even more advice when they visited their family doctor two days later.

Indeed, the doctor gave Brenda one more prescription for inflammation - but that was about it. Surprisingly, there was no mention of the most obvious and least expensive courses of treatment: ice; hot baths; massage therapy; and craniosacral therapy. Instead, Brenda was given one more drug and told to wait it out. If the pain didn't subside, she was told, an MRI might be next. After that, who knew?

Thankfully, Brenda had armed herself with a full spectrum of healthcare information. Rather than remain passive, she chose to seek out other options she knew were available to her. She received neuromuscular

therapy to release the muscles that had convulsed in an effort to protect her joints and bones. She received myofascial therapy to relieve the trauma to the tissues that ran like a web throughout her body. And she received more craniosacral therapy to alleviate any pressure on her brain and spinal cord, and help ensure that her central nervous system was free to facilitate a full recovery.

It's possible none of that may have happened if Brenda had simply taken her doctor's advice at face value. Unfortunately, it seems that health care these days has become a matter of self-defense. We have moved so far away from the wise family physician who cared for us from the time we were babies, approaching each malady with concern and common sense. Instead, the medical industry appears to be sliced up into small slivers, with each professional tending to focus on his or her own small segment.

In this case, the ER doctors were there to see that no bones were broken. The primary care physician was there to dispense the medication. And (thank goodness) Brenda's family was there to help her address the problem from the point of whole-body wellness. Now, after a series of simple, inexpensive measures, Brenda is well on her way to a full recovery. If she had taken the advice of only her allopathic doctors, she might still be in bed.

All this is to say that no one will ever tend to your health the way you can. As both practitioners and patients, it remains up to you to know what your choices are and demand them. This may seem obvious to you as holistic healthcare practitioners, yet I'm continually surprised at how many people are "stuck" in the general health care system without fully appreciating this point.

Yes, there are many good doctors out there who do everything they can to take care of their patients. (And believe me, insurance companies aren't making it easy for them.) But as I've said in the past, it's the patient's needs that should dictate the course of therapy. You play a crucial role in this state of self-defense.

By the way, by Brenda's third doctor visit, she finally asked if some type of massage therapy wouldn't help her heal faster. "It certainly could," came the reply, "but insurance probably won't pay for it." That may or may not be true, but that's a topic for another column altogether.

*Name has been changed to protect patient confidentiality.

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