

# Health Insights Today

A SERVICE OF THE CLEVELAND COLLEGE FOUNDATION

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## EDITOR'S LOG

### Open Mind

By Daniel Redwood, DC

**D**epth of understanding requires a willingness to see issues from more than one angle and to interpret what we see through more than one lens. Such multiple-perspective awareness can prove a source of uncertainty and discomfort, because it sometimes requires us to reconcile conflicting ideas. This is particularly challenging when two or more alternatives seem equally compelling.

At the other end of the scale, there is an unmistakable mental and visceral energy surge that accompanies single-minded certainty. This high can become addictive, crowding alternative possibilities from one's awareness. There are times in the course of our lives when such single-mindedness is necessary, particularly when survival is threatened. Some people who recover from seemingly terminal illnesses (so-called 'spontaneous remission') appear to achieve these 'miracles' by attaining an unwavering one-pointed focus, never allowing doubt into the room.

But in the non-emergency circumstances where we live most of our days, absence of doubt and lack of openness to alternatives exact a heavy toll. Under the spell of absolute certainty, we perceive events and information only through the narrow door of our preconceived notions and ideologies. This may strengthen our resolve in the short run, but it diminishes our flexibility and ultimately weakens our capacity to respond creatively to new situations. This is true when it comes to matters of health and other areas of life.

In this issue of *Health Insights Today*, we begin to explore ways to cultivate open-mindedness. We feature interviews with two perceptive writer-practitioners, Drs. Claire Cassidy and James Dillard, who have thought deeply about these questions and arrived at unique insights that have the potential to help guide our way forward.

### Nonjudgmental Evaluation

Claire Cassidy is a medical anthropologist and a leading edge proponent of that discipline's trademark methodologies—non-judgmental description of health care approaches and non-hierarchical comparison of different healing systems. Cassidy's approach is rooted in deep-seated humility. She never assumes that either she or anyone else has all the right answers. This leads her to steadfastly pursue additional information and new perspectives to broaden her understanding. She listens well, gives due consideration to the implications of her findings (and those of others) and consciously avoids jumping to premature conclusions. *Health Insights Today* is extremely pleased to bring her thought-provoking ideas to parts of the health community that may be unfamiliar with her work.

### Multiple-Perspective Thinking

James Dillard, who is among the very few doctors with full professional training in chiropractic, medicine and acupuncture, is an integrative pain management specialist. His unique background enables him, and perhaps forces him, to practice multiple-perspective thinking with every patient. He conveys this beautifully in his book, *The Chronic Pain Solution* (Bantam, 2004) and the PBS television special on the same topic that he wrote and moderated.

Dillard persuasively asserts that chronic pain patients—who constitute a significant part of chiropractic, acupuncture and medical practice—are best served by a multi-pronged, cross-disciplinary approach where all doctors and therapists recognize and appreciate the contributions of health professions outside their own. If a physical therapist, medical doctor, or acupuncturist is convinced that chiropractic has nothing worthwhile to offer, it is his or her patients who

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suffer from this misperception. Similarly, if a chiropractor rejects everything about these complementary approaches, once again it is patients that are shortchanged. Serving patients is our common goal. Cooperation across professional boundaries is our shared responsibility.

## Unexpected and Unusual

Being open to the unexpected and the unusual is a useful skill in a fast-changing world. It is also a source of joy and wonder. Christina Hering, our research assistant, spent much of her life working with animals prior to entering chiropractic school. Her article, "Health Benefits of Companion Animals," demonstrates that life sometimes offers up more goodness and inspiration than we ever believed possible.

She begins with the story of Lulu, a pot-bellied pig that saved the life of her human guardian. It's as uplifting a story as I've heard in quite a while. Reading it, I was reminded of a similar story at the beginning of Ram Dass and Paul Gorman's inspiring book, *How Can I Help?* (Knopf, 1985), in which a scuba diver, who has just accepted the horror of his death by drowning, is rescued at the last moment by a dolphin that nuzzles under him, lifts him to the surface like an underwater angel and then risks its own safety to bring him all the way to shore. Stories like these demonstrate the perceptiveness, intelligence and sensitivity of other species and call into question any assumptions of human superiority.

Hering reports on a series of research studies that demonstrate how the presence of animals improves the health of those who care for them, in cases ranging from cardiovascular disease to stress reactions to allergies. I found the allergy connection particularly striking since its conclusion ran counter to my expectations. As reported in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, infants in homes with at least two animals were up to 77 percent less likely to develop allergies.

## Expecting and Embracing Change

Here at Cleveland Chiropractic College, we teach our students that what they learn in school is part of a lifelong learning process. We tell them to expect new discoveries throughout their careers and encourage them to incorporate these new insights into their work on an ongoing basis.

Surprises come with the territory. Change can be good for us. These are the watchwords of the emerging global culture. Open-mindedness is the key. Sir Thomas Dewar said it best, "Minds are like parachutes: they only function when they're open."

**Daniel Redwood, DC, is editor-in-chief of *Health Insights Today*.**