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Thank you for entrusting in the compounding services at Madison Medical Compounding Pharmacy to help meet the unique medication needs of your patients. We are excited to share our monthly newsletter with you and look forward to working with you. Please don't hesitate to let us know how we can assist you and your practice.

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FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE: Treating the Cause Versus the Symptoms

The goal of Functional Medicine is to determine how and why illness occurs and restore health by addressing the root causes of disease with a treatment plan personalized for each individual. This model is a patient-centered, science-based approach that empowers patients and practitioners to work together to treat the underlying causes of disease and promote optimal wellness.

“By addressing root cause, rather than symptoms, practitioners become oriented to identifying the complexity of disease. They may find one condition has many different causes and, likewise, one cause may result in many different conditions. As a result, Functional Medicine treatment targets the specific manifestations of disease in each individual.”¹

Functional Medicine considers the genetic, physiological, environmental, and lifestyle factors that influence health and disease. “The precise manifestation of each cause depends on the individual’s genes, environment, and lifestyle, and only treatments that address the right cause will have lasting benefit beyond symptom suppression.”¹

Functional Medicine is healing-oriented medicine that addresses the whole person, not just an isolated set of symptoms. In contrast, conventional medicine is often centered around symptom relief. Prescription medications relieve the symptoms or treat the acute issue, but



Getting to the Root of the Problem

typically do not resolve the root problem. Rather than focusing solely on one specific problem and the resulting signs and symptoms, Functional Medicine examines the whole body and the factors that are causing illness.

Our compounding pharmacist works with physicians to find causes for each patient's problems and customize therapies that meet individual needs. We can target the root cause, such as cortisol or hormone depletion, a methylation pathway, and the source of pain. We can also recommend quality supplements to restore or achieve optimal wellness.

Here are some examples:

Hormone Replacement Therapy: Hormones affect all aspects of a person's health. When hormone levels decline, dramatic changes can occur that affect many aspects of health and well-being. Bioidentical hormones (estrogens, progesterone, testosterone and thyroid hormones) can be compounded in individualized doses to meet each patient's specific needs.

The need for hormone therapy in aging women transcends symptoms such as mood changes, sexual response, and weight gain. Results from more than 40 observational studies conducted in women over three decades have shown the cardioprotective effects of postmenopausal hormone replacement therapy. Women taking estrogen in these observational trials experienced a consistent 30% to 50% reduction in cardiovascular (CV) events. The biologic benefit of estrogen has been attributed to improvements in lipid profiles and endothelial function.² Micronized progesterone yields a more favorable elevation in HDL than other progestogens. And, progesterone has been shown to lower blood pressure.³

Yet, in many cases, estrogen and progesterone therapy, as well as the specific form of hormone that is best to treat a specific problem, is not considered when addressing the risk of heart disease. Functional Medicine considers the effects that hormones have on every organ and system.

Low Dose Naltrexone (LDN): LDN is a lower dose of the FDA-approved drug naltrexone. There are a number of promising, small-scale trials that demonstrate its effectiveness in addressing the root cause of many chronic conditions. LDN can be compounded by prescription for treatment of inflammatory bowel diseases, skin conditions like psoriasis, and chronic pain conditions like rheumatoid arthritis.

Probiotics: Although conventional medicine often does not consider gut health when treating a patient with stress-induced illness, Functional Medicine addresses multiple causes and approaches to therapy. Several studies have investigated the effect of prebiotic and probiotic intervention on emotional dysregulation. Using cortisol as an index of the stress response, the probiotics *Lactobacillus helveticus* and *Bifidobacterium longum* as well as the prebiotic galactooligosaccharide were effective in boosting the subject's resilience to stress and improved emotional responses.⁴

Our pharmacist can recommend probiotic preparations that contain adequate CFUs of the specific probiotic combinations that are most appropriate to treat specific issues.

In summary, conventional therapy is often focused on symptom relief. Prescriptions may not treat the root problem. Patients benefit from more in-depth interactions with their providers. Following the role model developed in 1991 by Susan and Dr. Jeffrey Bland, the founders of functional medicine, our pharmacists strive to provide patient care that is systems-oriented and patient-focused. Functional Medicine seeks to reverse the growing chronic disease epidemics.

Community pharmacists are uniquely positioned to provide enriched care. Because they have the freedom to spend additional time and resources on their patients, pharmacists can go beyond dispensing to offer solutions in addition to the prescribed medication. Patients with chronic illness are excellent candidates for more personalized care. When patients visit our pharmacy, our pharmacists can seize this opportunity to offer a more functional approach to care. For example, we often see patients who suffer from multiple symptoms such as joint problems, hypertension, diarrhea, and atopic dermatitis — all indicators of inflammation. This patient would normally be referred to different specialists but a Functional

Medicine approach that targets the root cause of inflammation may resolve or improve a spectrum of signs and symptoms.

Our pharmacist welcomes your questions and the opportunity to work together with patients and other health care practitioners to develop treatments for difficult medical problems, and focus on achieving optimal wellness.

References:

¹ <https://www.ifm.org/functional-medicine>

² [Manson, J., et al., "Clinical practice. Postmenopausal hormone replacement therapy," NEJM 2001; 345\(1\):34-40.](#)

³ [L'hermite, M., et al., "Could transdermal estradiol + progesterone be a safer postmenopausal HRT? A review," Maturitas 2008; 60:185-201.](#)

⁴ [Rea K, Dinan TG, Cryan JF. The microbiome: a key regulator of stress and neuroinflammation. Neurobiol Stress. 2016;4:23-33.](#)

