

My Path to Integrative Medicine

Stuart H Freedенfeld, MD

I was a rebellious youth, born in the forties and inspired by the awareness movements of the sixties. Having aspired to scientific research since my earliest memories, it was during my last year in college that I shifted focus and came to know that my passion was to devote my life to the healing profession. Having excelled in high school and college, I felt drawn to the more glorious pursuits of the surgical subspecialties especially neurosurgery. While working in the inner city free clinics, which are training centers where inexperienced doctors-in-training practice their new skills on the areas poor and uninsured, I realized that my inspiration came from the people that I served and not from the skills that I had to offer them. Family Practice seemed the only area where I could devote myself to the patient rather than the procedure.

After completing my residency in Family Practice, I entered private practice with Kirk Seaton, MD, who had been the director of the Philips Barber Family Health Center where I had trained. Together we formed Stockton Family Practice. After only two years he decided to return to academic medicine. For the next four years I was the solo physician at SFP. I worked six days per week including two evenings and every Saturday. I was taking call and even delivering babies seven days per week, fifty-two weeks per year. I still get excited with the memories of delivering over 500 babies during my medical career and am thrilled to have been present at the beginnings of so many new families.

These were exhausting years. So when Sal D'Angio knocked on my office door saying he was just finishing his residency training and wondered if I would consider letting him join SFP, I was more than eager to learn about this new physician. He told me about his background and how he had also studied homeopathy, acupuncture and herbal medicine. It intrigued me as it was a far different medical experience than I had had.

Medical school is a place for learning, but it is also a place for conforming. My training had not expanded my horizons, rather it had narrowed my focus. Now this new doctor reinvigorated my passion for learning and my natural tendency to think outside the box. We established a collaborative relationship as we each learned what the other had to offer. But this was not easy for me. Sal understood and taught his skills in ethereal terms but I was a scientist at heart and needed to understand healing in biochemical terms. In a sense, my early studies in these "alternative" approaches were like studying poetry in a foreign language in which I had only limited knowledge. I could say the words but could not grasp the intricacies of meaning. I could see that alternative therapies worked but I could not relate to them in terms that made sense to me.

My great awakening occurred in 1989. Three of my patients in one year had very poor outcomes related to conventional treatments for their coronary artery disease. One 54 year old died during the angiogram study, another died immediately after his bypass surgery and the third, a 79 year old woman had successful bypass but suffered terribly for a year with various complications. None of these individuals had severe symptoms and none had immediately life threatening disease, but each one suffered from standard medical care. I felt obligated to learn more about alternatives. I had heard about chelation therapy for cardiovascular disease but had no personal experience so I went to a 5-day conference on chelation and other aspects of complimentary medicine sponsored by ACAM (The American College for the Advancement of Medicine).

I was blown away. Not only was there science behind chelation, but I found myself at a conference taught by world leading scientists, discussing their own particular area of research. Until then, all medical conferences that I had attended were taught by doctors discussing pharmaceutical treatments and presenting the research that was bought and paid for by the pharmaceutical industry. This same industry was also paying their speaker fees. How refreshing to hear information from people who held my own passion for research and shared their knowledge for the sake of healing rather for the sake of selling. Suddenly hawthorn, coenzyme Q 10, L-carnitine and magnesium took on whole different perspectives.

I was so overwhelmed with this abundance of information that I literally could not sleep for the entire five days of this conference. The speakers spoke of alternative medicine and they spoke in my own language, the language of science.

That five-day conference was my epiphany. Since then I have never lost my enthusiasm for learning or my zeal for the healing arts. In the years since 1989 I have continued to pursue knowledge for the sake of my patients with a driving passion that still gives me exhausted evenings and sleepless weekends. I wonder at the universe of knowledge and am humbled by the vastness of the unknown. My enthusiasm comes from the needs of those that I serve and my energy for my work comes from positive feedback. In a symbiotic fashion, I am nourished by those that I nurture. I learn from those that I teach. I am healed by those I attend.

For the past 15 years Stockton Family Practice has been devoted to integrating the finest aspects of healing arts from around the world and throughout time. Our goal is to be able to provide the safest and most effective approaches to health and healing for those that come to learn and be well. There is no retirement from this pursuit, only gratification. And so to all of you who give me strength, I say thank you.