

“Let Medicine be Thy Food”

By Kevin Logan MD

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The great thinker Hippocrates professed this simple philosophy over 2000 years ago but unfortunately it has been forgotten in this current era of modern medicine’s obsession with synthetic pharmaceuticals as “thy” medicine and technology as our savior. Yet this basic wisdom is as valid today as it was in the 4th century BC.

As a physician, I recited the Hippocratic Oath upon graduation from medical school with genuine intentions as I am sure my colleagues did. However the chasm between Hippocrates’ famous quote, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”, has grown to be a distant memory in the minds of most physicians practicing today. In place of the basics there continues to be an ever expanding number of treatments that are designed to relieve human suffering simply by swallowing a pill or subjecting oneself to a surgical intervention.

In the United States there is a growing disconnect between health and medicine. Disease and diagnosis have become the sine qua non for treatment recommendations. And with each seemingly unrelated condition or diagnosis there is a separate set of prescribed treatments that are completely independent of the original problem. Also there is little scientific research exploring the safety and long term side effects of not just one treatment but multiple treatments and unknown interactions. Currently there is little attention paid to discovering, understanding and treating the root cause of presenting symptoms because it won’t change the prescribed treatment.

Despite record expenditures on “healthcare” our outcomes by all measures are dismal. We spend more per capita than any other developed nation in the world yet we consistently rank with less industrialized nations on many health related matters. Unfortunately, medicine has lost site of the basics and has become an industry much like the industrialization of agriculture. And consider for a moment that there may be a connection between these two. If we compare statistics on cancer, arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and every known degenerative process you will find a link between dietary changes and increased incidence of these diseases.

The introduction of vegetable oils as replacements for butter and lard, the introduction of high fructose corn syrup as replacements for cane and beet sugar (as well as dramatic increase in per capita consumption), and the replacement of fat and cholesterol with sugar are all directly linked to the increase in diabetes and heart disease in the US. Despite cholesterol lowering medications, avoidance of fat, and advances in treatments for cardiovascular disease the origin these illnesses remains elusive and they continue to be the number one cause of death in the United States.

It is imperative that we return to the basic wisdom espoused by Hippocrates if we are to establish health and wellness as individuals within the context of our families, our societies and the whole of humanity. Food is the most basic medium of energy yet the

most critical for maintaining health and preventing disease. Therefore, where we purchase our food, how it is grown and how it is prepared are critical steps in this pursuit of health and wellness. Organically grown food has many benefits and is growing in popularity these days however purchasing and eating organically grown strawberries imported from Chile in the middle of December is not necessarily a wise choice. Not only from an energy conservation standpoint but also because the nutrient value is minimal. These foods have to be picked at a very early state of ripeness then transported for thousand of miles with exposure to diesel fumes to end up in a plastic container that has only one use. It is next to impossible to extract the necessary life giving nutrients out of this essentially depleted food, not to mention the negative impact this process has on our environment.

It's time to take action and truly make a difference in our lives and those around us. To become a part of a viable and sustainable future you may want to consider some of these simple steps:

1. Buy local-get to know your grower through a CSA (community supported agriculture) or local framers market
2. Better yet try growing some of your own food
3. Learn to prepare whole foods in ways that preserve the integrity of the food
4. Eat less- the yogis say no more than what you can hold in the palms of your hands
5. Be mindful of all that you consume

It is imperative that we take the health of our bodies and the planet into our own hands. One critical step is through the decisions we make every day about what we are going to eat for lunch.

Dr. Kevin Logan will be addressing the topic "Diet and the Global Ecology" at the International Interfaith Symposium on Thursday March 20 at 8pm in the new IUPUI Campus Center. For a complete schedule visit www.internationalinterfaith.org