

final word

Healing and Wholeness: Mapping an Integral Approach to Healthcare



BIOGRAPHY

Marilyn Schlitz, PhD is vice president for Research and Education at the Institute of Noetic Sciences and senior scientist at the Research Institute of the California Pacific Medical Center. Schlitz completed a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Texas, Austin and a post-doctoral fellowship in psychology at Stanford University. She has published over 200 articles in the area of consciousness studies, is the co-editor of *Consciousness and Healing. Integral Approaches to Mind Body Medicine* (Churchill Livingstone/Elsevier, 2005), has conducted research at Stanford University, has taught at Trinity University, Stanford University and Harvard Medical School, and has lectured widely at sites including the United Nations and the Smithsonian Institution. She served as a congressionally appointed advisory member for the National Institutes of Health Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, and is currently on the board of trustees for the Esalen Institute and the IONS board of directors.

There is a new breeze blowing through medicine today. Amidst the storms of confusion that define much about the healthcare industry, there is reason to feel hope and possibility. This new breeze is called Integral Medicine, and it provides a model in which personal relationships, emotions, meaning and belief systems are viewed as fundamental points of connection between body, mind, spirit, society and nature. It is a model that appreciates the best of western scientific approaches, but calls for a more complete understanding of healing and curing.

Patients and professionals alike are demanding that the heart and soul of medicine be reinstated. For increasing numbers of healthcare consumers and professionals, this integral impulse necessarily provides a longed-for alternative to a system that focuses on disease and pathology while frequently overlooking the vast potential of healing. Ultimately, integral medicine is creating the possibility for human transcendence in the face of illness and disease; the possibility for breakthrough and transformation out of crisis and confusion (Schlitz, Vieten, and Amorok, 2008). Indeed, we see this happening already.

Mitchell Krucoff, for example, is not your average cardiologist. He does have all the standard stuff a good cardiologist has...credentials, publications, a heavy patient load, grants to be written, research to be done. What makes him stand out, however, isn't his great mastery of the best technology that Duke Medical Center has to offer. Rather, it's a recognition that in treating his patients, he is participating as part of a whole system that includes the bodies, minds and spirits of all who enter into the healing relationship.

As part of his practice, Krucoff's group introduced a short little meditation called the physician's prayer from Mother Teresa. "No matter how busy the day, before we walk into the Cath Lab, we stop and just read through this prayer. Isn't fancy, but it divides the lab space from everything else in the day." (in Schlitz, 2005). How far a reach, he asks us, is it to have everyone stop for 60 seconds once the patient's on the table, "simply to remember how much trust that person is putting into our hands? 60 seconds a case?"

Krucoff, like all of us who have some investment in a positive future for healthcare, recognize that a primary focus of modern medicine on the objective, material world has come at a cost — frequently obscuring what is meaningful and valuable in human experience.

Today, the integral perspective is gaining momentum. A revisioning of the theoretical underpinnings of modern medicine is being called for, as we seek to create a new map. Although there is no universal consensus on just what this new map looks like, it is clear that it also includes the mapmaker, as both a product and a participant in that which he or she seeks to know and represent.

Indeed, this integral perspective calls for deep change within the practitioners ourselves as we embark on a transformation in worldview. As integral philosopher, Ken Wilber, has noted: "The crucial ingredient in any integral medical practice is not the integral medical bag itself...but the holder of that bag. Integrally informed health-care practitioners, the doctors and nurses and therapists, have opened themselves to an entire spectrum of consciousness — matter to body to mind to soul to spirit — and who have thereby acknowledged what seems to be happening in any event. Body and mind and spirit are operating in self, culture, and nature, and thus health and healing, sickness and wholeness, are all bound up in a multidimensional tapestry that cannot be cut into without loss."

Simply by taking the time to consider an integral perspective, we are helping to hospice an old paradigm that is ceasing to work. In so doing, we must be gentle with ourselves, with each other, and with a system of medicine that is struggling with its very existence. Change can be hard. But it is also revitalizing and ultimately transformative. Just as one paradigm dies, so another will be born. For this, we may enthusiastically offer ourselves up as midwives. As we engage in this endeavor to bring new life into the world, we are not alone. Together we can birth a better future.