Optimizing Metabolism

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Accelerating Progress in Chronic Disease Prevention with 'Medical Bipartisanship'

This anniversary edition of *Townsend Letter* is themed "Best of Naturopathic Medicine." In public health we often define *best* as that which confers the biggest impact for the most number of people. Obesity-related chronic diseases are widespread, and their treatment requires teamwork across naturopathic and allopathic medicine. Medically speaking, bipartisanship is needed!

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) published and promulgated what could be viewed as a request for medical bipartisanship to address a formidable challenge: one-third of adults and close to one-fifth of children and adolescents in the US are obese. The IOM serves as adviser to the nation to improve health, providing independent objective evidence-based advice to policy makers, health professionals, the private sector, and the public. The comprehensive findings of the IOM task force are presented in its report *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation*. This landmark publication presents a series of goals, including "transform messages about nutrition and expand the roles of health care providers."

Naturopathic physicians may be especially well suited to "transform messages about nutrition." Here's why. After decades of journeying on different paths, food and medicine are located far apart. Food has become bereft of the nutrients vital to its healing properties, and modern medicine has sought to heal with technical advances which at the outset may seem more powerful than food. The current gap between food and medicine is illustrated in our terminology which considers food as "alternative" to modern medicine. This gap is not appropriate or healthful, as in fact food and nutrients are the original medicine, the shoulders on which modern medicine stands. Naturopathic physicians have consistently maintained and trained that food is medicine. Perhaps there is a "Hail to the Chef" to be sung across the aisle akin to the uniting presidential anthem, "Hail to the Chief."

Naturopathic physicians may uniquely meet the "expanded roles of health care providers." The training in nutrition and metabolism may address the limitations of the diet and exercise approach to chronic disease prevention. The limitations to what is sometimes referred to as lifestyle medicine are that patients are often too tired to exercise and too driven by food cravings to select healthful choices. Fatigue and cravings are associated with low success rates for weight reduction. A lack of success despite effort can dampen a patient's efforts to adopt other positive health behaviors in the future. However, this is not inevitable. By addressing the underlying metabolic aberrations with combined allopathic and naturopathic approaches, patient efforts toward diet and exercise can succeed.

I consider it a tremendous privilege to play a role in fostering a bipartisan initiative of 70 chapter authors. The most recent version of the team-authored medical text that I edit is *Advancing Medicine with Food and Nutrients, Second Edition* (CRC Press, Dec. 2012; also available as an e-book). Among the book's reviewers is an endorsement from Michael J. Cronin, ND, president of the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians: "It represents a unique collaborative, written by leaders in naturopathic and allopathic medicine. Current, with relevant research and practical details, it merits a place on any naturopathic physician's shelf or teaching library." Several chapters on obesity-related chronic disease are coauthored by an MD and ND:

- The chapter on migraine headaches, coauthored by Damien Downing, MBBS, MSB; Joseph E. Pizzorno Jr., ND; and Maya Shetreat-Klein, MD. Diet-related swings in insulin levels are a common and treatment-responsive migraine trigger. Several plants are used to stabilize insulin levels and potentially can reduce the need for medications that may have a less attractive side-effect profile.
- Authored by David M. Brady ND, DC; Jacob Teitelbaum, MD; and Alan Weiss, MD, the chapter on fibromyalgia presents evidence-based strategies at improving caloric balance.