



## VAN FORUM NOTES

October 11, 2005

Taking Charge of Your Health: Expanding the Potential for Health and Well-being

“No matter how old you are, you can benefit from understanding how your body, mind and spirit changes over the years, and make the small adjustments that can help create a fuller and more enriching life.”

- Andrew Weil, M.D.

**INTRODUCTION.** Jan Hively, VAN Senior Advisor, welcomed the participants to VAN's October forum held at the Calvary Center Cooperative in Golden Valley, MN. She introduced the topic of taking charge of your health by asking participants to identify their health challenges with aging.

Participants responded with:

- Physical mobility.
- Practicing what I already know.
- I've shrunk and the Department of Motor Vehicles does not believe me – they still record me at my previous height.
- Shrunk four inches due to severe osteoporosis.
- Breathing.
- Being sure that I stay with my walking.
- Can't see too good – blood vessel broke in right eye.
- No particular problem.
- Need to take good care of my health.
- Sticking with exercise regimen.
- The right diet for high blood sugar and high blood pressure.
- Eating good nutritious meals.
- Weight control.
- Finding a medical professional who can think more holistically.
- Motivation and self discipline.
- Heart problems, high blood pressure and diabetes.
- Macular degeneration and knees.
- Chronic cough caused by asthma.
- Paying for health care into the future.
- Physically keeping up with young daughter.
- Consistent exercise program.
- Stress associated with job search.
- Weight training.
- Learning to be interdependent and lean on others.

- Learning to be focused and at peace with myself and others.
- Finding ways to keep my body lively and moving and enjoying life.
- Staying out of the hospital.
- Remembering to never act my age.
- Finding ways to share and communicate what I have learned about health and wellness.
- Foot problems due to several injuries.
- Osteoporosis and scoliosis.
- Hard time accepting the fact that some day I will get old.
- Control my diet and exercise to deal effectively with a high glucose count.
- Diet and exercise – consistency.
- Keeping up with grandchildren.
- Nutritious diet.
- Difficulty finding reliable information, especially related to exercise and health.
- Find myself saying “What did you say?” a little too often – must have a hearing problem.
- Gap in knowing about healthy lifestyle behaviors and putting them into action.
- Is a downhill ski racer although many operations – wants to continue to do her passion.
- Sustain exercise program.
- Keeping memory strong.
- Keeping memory strong and trying to find more affordable insurance.
- Work/life balance problem.

During the introductions, several new books written by audience members were identified. They include:

- “Body Odyssey: Lessons from the Bones and Belly” (Syren Book Co.)  
Author: Pat Samples  
This book is a memoir and guide that celebrates the emotional and spiritual wisdom of our aging bodies.
- “The Grace of Ordinary Days: An Invitation to Celebrate Life’s Journey”  
Authors: Kay Saunders and Bernie Saunders (Mother and Son)  
Website: [www.centerforlivingart.com](http://www.centerforlivingart.com)  
Telephone: 763-479-1226  
Email: [bernie@centerforlivingart.com](mailto:bernie@centerforlivingart.com)
- “The Ageless Spirit”  
Author: Connie Goldman
- “Never Act Your Age: Play the Happy Childlike Role Well at Every Age”  
Author: Dale Anderson

Jan introduced Mary Jo Kreitzer PhD, RN. Mary Jo is the founder and director of the Center for Spirituality and Healing at the University of Minnesota. Over the last ten years, her Center has provided leadership for integrating complementary therapies and healing practices with medical research, care and outreach. Mary Jo has already made a significant impact on the health care system – an impact that reaches nationwide.

Mary Jo identified the objectives of her presentation: to instill in audience members a new motivation to take charge of their health and provide them with new ideas and tools to do so.

### **What is integrative medicine?**

- The field used to be called Alternative Medicine – a term that connotes that these therapies are not a part of mainstream healthcare. However, studies show that half of the adult population in the U.S. use some form of complementary healing. Additionally, more visits are made to complementary providers than to primary care providers. But, over 60 percent of people do not tell their doctor/nurse that they are using complementary medicine. Take home message: this is not a good situation. We need to educate health care professionals.
- The U of M is one of 30 medical schools that have an integrative medicine program. Integrative medicine is a term that acknowledges that 95 percent of people want the best of conventional and complementary/alternative medicine. It's about more than healing or managing chronic disease – it includes prevention and optimal overall health.

### **What is the Center for Spirituality and Healing? What does it do?**

- Educates health professionals. The Center's classes are part of required curriculum of medical students, public health students, pharmacy students and veterinary students. The goal is to help them understand that there are other kinds of legitimate healers. For example, first year students spend a half day at Northwestern Sciences University learning about traditional Chinese medicine, including acupuncture. In addition, second year medical students return to Northwestern Sciences University to learn about chiropractic medicine.
- Offers a graduate program in complementary therapies and alternative medicine. Students in other fields can take classes in this area. For example, architecture students learn how to create healing environments. The number of students taking classes from the Center has grown from 30 students in the first semester to 376 students in the most recent semester
- Trains researchers.
- Generates new knowledge through research. The Center has many NIH grants and is an official center for research for the federal government in this field.
- Creates integrated care delivery models.
- Shapes policy and reimbursement.
- Educates consumers.

### **What are the specific activities of the Center for Spirituality and Healing?**

- Facilitates/sponsors lectures, workshops and retreats. For example, audience members are invited to join the Center for an inspiring discussion on aging well with bestselling author and renowned health and wellness expert, Dr. Andrew Weil. Facilitated by Richard Leider, one of the world's top life coaches, participants will learn what aging means for their bodies and their minds and hear Dr. Weil's practical, yet innovative, advice on how everyone at any age can learn to age more

healthily, happily and gracefully. The \$40 admission includes Dr. Weil's new book "Healthy Aging." Tickets available by visiting [www.csh.umn.edu](http://www.csh.umn.edu). Discussion will take place on Thursday, Dec. 8, 7:00 p.m. at the Fitzgerald Theatre in St. Paul.

- Offers Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. These therapies are based in very solid research. Mary Jo works with transplant patients who experience a lot of anxiety, depression and difficulty sleeping after their procedures. They benefit significantly from mindfulness meditation.
- Hosts online education options through the Center's Web site at [www.csh.umn.edu](http://www.csh.umn.edu).
  - Series for health professionals.
    - Offers information for health care professionals on integrative and complementary medicine and approaches.
  - Series for consumers.
    - Taking charge of your health. This online course walks you through a personal health and lifestyle assessment. Recommendations for lifestyle changes are generated based on your results and resources links are provided.
    - Developing a plan for your personal health and well-being. PBS is starting a new show called "The New Medicine." This online tool will be on their new website related to this show.
- Creating the Purpose Project. The Center is working with Richard Leider on this effort. Leider's new book is called "Claiming Your Place at the Fire," which argues that individual purpose and meaning in life is a cradle-to-grave process. The book answers the essential question, "What makes me want to get out of bed in the morning?" becomes even more vital to staying alive as we age and retire.

### **Taking charge of your health –what does it mean?**

- Assume personal responsibility for your own health and well-being.
  - Why? Factors that most contribute to health and well-being are things you do for yourself – lifestyle factors affect 90 percent of health outcomes and you will experience increased satisfaction with your healthcare. The cost of healthcare is another reason for taking charge of your health – a social and personal responsibility.
  - How? From the book by Ed Kreagan (2003) titled, "How Not To Become Your Doctor":
    - Form stable and long-term relationships.
    - Maintain ideal body weight.
    - Eat a plant-based diet and make sensible food choices.
    - Engage in regular physical activity.
    - Don't smoke.
    - Use alcohol in moderation.
    - Foster a sense of spirituality.
    - Find meaning and purpose in life.
- Learn to navigate the health care system.
  - Make informed choices regarding your healthcare.
  - Find healthcare providers who meet your needs.
  - Communicate more effectively with healthcare providers.

- Find and evaluate health information on the web and elsewhere.
  - Explore options in healing, including complementary or alternative therapies.
- Develop a plan.

### **What are the components of a plan to take charge of your health?**

- Become intentional.
  - Mary Jo has had osteoarthritis for eight years and is getting her second full knee replacement tomorrow. She explored many options after her diagnosis. She lost weight and walked more. But, the pain got worse. She was asked, “what is important to you?” Her goal was to be able to return to physical activity that was important to her. You have to know your goal.
- Become informed.
  - It is very difficult to learn about health care procedures. Mary Jo interviewed physicians and investigated hospitals. Not every physician or hospital does the same thing the same way. First learn by word of mouth. And then go to the internet and learn about the safety records of hospitals, infection rates, and quality outcomes.
- Become involved.
  - Assume responsibility for what happens after the procedure – she now has to do one hour of exercises two times a day – a huge change in daily behavior for Mary Jo!
  - An individual received gastric bypass surgery – afterwards they also permanently changed their eating habits, increased their exercise, and received psychotherapy so that they would not gain the weight back.
- Use the Center’s Web site to take charge of your health – make use of the tips, links and resources that are available. You can also learn how to search the internet to learn more about a health topic.

### **How do you choose a health care provider?**

- Research their qualifications and training.
- Identify their hospital affiliation.
- Learn about their philosophy of care – is it a patient empowered/centered model?
- Are they knowledgeable about complementary therapies?
- Talk to the provider’s team members.

### **How do you communicate effectively with your provider?**

- Don’t wait until last minute to discuss primary concern.
- Be prepared to tell your story
- Think about writing your story down.
- Most physicians interrupt their patients within 20 seconds – you need to be prepared.

### **Other components of taking charge of your health**

- As for your medical records - if you are diagnosed with a serious condition you will be seeing multiple providers. You must have copies of records, bills, tests, claims, reports and keep notes. This can all be kept in a three-ring binder.
- Guard against medical errors – a very high number of deaths each year are due to medical errors in the hospital – be proactive. Blue Cross Blue Shield provides a Web site with information to compare the quality of hospitals.
- Have a Health Care Advocate – have someone with you to help you navigate the system.

Join VAN at the next forum:

**November 8: Loss but Not Lost: The Challenge of Maintaining Mental Health**

Mary Claire Wahlberg, Hamm Clinic

10 a.m. to noon Lenox Community Center, St. Louis Park