

# Who's on your HEALTH CARE TEAM?

By Dr. Tamara MacIntyre

With so many people turning to natural health care to treat or prevent health problems, it's more important than ever to make sure you know who and what you're investing your time and money in.

Natural practitioners are relied upon to fill the gaps in the overburdened system of conventional medicine. However, the natural health care community has historically faced the challenge of lack of evidence-based strategies, inadequate funding for research, as well as a lack of credentials and/or credibility.

Who do you choose and what do you look for in a practitioner to help you negotiate through the conventional system and provide you with viable, effective, evidence-based solutions to your health concerns? Do they offer strategies that are congruent with your health care philosophy? Are multiple options provided? Have they laid out a treatment plan and accompanying timeframe? Do they take the time to explain what is happening?

Do they offer effective, efficient and affordable options that set you up for success, not failure? Do they come from a place of integrity and recognize boundaries?

Even with the best care, many people are overwhelmed with well-meaning

suggestions by friends and family, or articles they have read on-line, to the point of feeling paralyzed when making decisions regarding their health. Navigating our medical system when going through a health crisis can often be a frustrating and emotional experience. Working in partnership with an experienced, caring professional can turn what is often one of the most difficult struggles into a rewarding experience.

Here are a few guidelines and suggestions when considering consulting a non-traditional health care provider:

The DOCTOR's responsibility is to:

- be regulated, hold appropriate credentials and pursue continuing education;
- aid in identification of health goals and priorities;
- determine what forms of care are appropriate;
- explain findings in a meaningful and understandable way;
- present a care plan that is both manageable and attainable;
- be available — physically and emotionally as you work through your care plan;
- monitor progress and adapt as necessary;
- hold the patient accountable; and
- exceed expectations in delivering personalized individualized care.

The PATIENT's responsibility is to:

- declare and disclose all symptoms of your problem;
- identify and help the practitioner prioritize health goals and desired outcomes;
- evaluate recommendations, review and research;
- engage in honest and open communication;
- make your level of involvement clear;
- participate in the healing process; and
- be patient — healing takes time.

Choosing the right doctor and health care team to provide advocacy for your health is a necessity. Having all practitioners communicate and work in tandem in a

concurrent care plan should be your goal. Ask critical and thoughtful questions before committing to a treatment plan. Ask to speak with the practitioner, request names of other patients, and ask about his/her reputation to ensure you are in the right place for you. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't!

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