

DR. JOHN DEMPSTER

ON FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHALIE ANN

NORTH AMERICAN doctors set the gold standard in acute crisis care, but are ranked only 30th in the world when it comes to effective treatment of chronic disease. While the exact reason for this mis-match is unclear, one hypothesis is that westernized medicine tries to treat the specific “broken part” without thoroughly understanding all of the reasons that it broke in the first place, or continues to “run” poorly. Sometimes modern medicine is able to cure an illness, but overall drugs and surgeries are doing very little to stem the tide of these diseases. It is time for a paradigm shift; one where both patients and their doctors begin looking at health through different eyes.

Doctors like John Dempster are leading the way with a new approach to well-being called functional medicine. Dr. Dempster explains,

“In essence, functional medicine is designed to slow the degenerative process of aging.”

“Instead of using the ‘shotgun approach,’ functional medicine is customized medicine.” It is very patient-centred and based on the idea that the body is not a series of parts that are haphazardly assembled, but an integrated system, carefully engineered to function as a whole.

Dr. Dempster calls functional medicine “the GPS of your biochemistry,” because it goes beyond just fixing the immediate symptom, to looking at underlying issues that have created and exacerbated the problem. Through functional medicine it is possible to reduce the risks of chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and other auto-immune degenerative diseases. In essence, functional medicine is designed to slow the degenerative process of



aging. More specifically, Dr. Dempster refers to aging as “accelerated cellular degeneration.” He argues that “if you are able to decelerate this destructive process, it is possible to effectively slow aging.”

Dr. Dempster began practicing functional medicine 7 years ago, and then continued his education, graduating from the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine (A4M), earning an advanced fellowship in functional, regenerative and anti-aging medicine. The A4M is both the fastest growing medical society, and the premier addresser of aging. Its membership stands at 26,000 professionals, spread across 110 nations. Dr. Dempster’s practice follows the path blazed by Dr. Mark Hyman, Chairman of the Board for the Institute of Functional Medicine. The foundation of the art is a focus that goes well beyond plain medicine, examining the body’s structural, biological, physical, emotional and biochemical underpinnings.

Functional medicine’s main tools are a set of tests that look at the biochemical, physical, and emotional building blocks of the whole body system. Each of these building blocks is scientifically proven to affect your DNA. These tests

work as a set of tools, and can include assessments of nutrient levels, food sensitivities, toxins in the body, hormone imbalances, neurotransmitter function, and stool, to check for possible invaders in the gut. None of these tests will be performed at your regular doctor.

Each test is very in depth, but in the end it is not the tests that make the difference. Anyone can run tests. Your body is continually trying to communicate with you, scream at you, send up distress flares. Each of these tests is a communication, a small piece of your body’s Rosetta stone. But someone needs to speak the language. The pieces need to be fitted together correctly, interpreted, and understood at a scientifically sound medical level. Only then will inflammation, excesses, deficiencies, or other imbalances be evident. Only then can a custom plan be framed and integrated to reverse and avoid chronic disease.

A person with a chronic disease requires an integrative approach to treatment. Dr. Dempster states, “When there is already disease it means the horse is out of the barn.” In these cases western drugs can help curb the ravaging effects of disease - however the ultimate goal of

functional medicine is to seek out the root, and then use naturopathic treatments to remedy this root cause. The overwhelming goal of using integrative and functional medicine together is to get those already ill to a place where they need fewer and fewer drugs, and keeping those close to getting chronic diseases from getting sick and needing these drugs.

Different circumstances, different genetics, and different life experiences have shaped our current, individual health conditions. For many patients, it may be time to consider a health approach that takes these simple facts into account. Functional medicine has the inherent flexibility to treat patients at the individual level, something sorely missing in present western medicine. This approach is its strength: it can cure chronic disease, slow aging, speed healing, elevate mood, and help patients achieve all around better health and as a result, a happier life.