

## Natural Medicine and Medicine.

by Julie Green ND

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The four summary quotes presented to us prior to this meeting today are frequently voiced attacks on natural medicine. These are my thoughts:

1. The majority of people go to their GP when unwell. If not completely satisfied with treatment, they start to explore other options. The person desires to feel better and the distinction between alternative, complementary and conventional treatment seems quite irrelevant to them at this point. Alternative, complementary, conventional and natural become part of the same continuum of regaining health.

2. Human beings are complex systems and as physics teaches, tiny changes can make huge differences to complex systems. This is something we all observe – it is often the small things in peoples' lives that help or hinder. For example, removing a certain food from the diet may produce highly significant improvement in digestive health; removal of a stressor may result in vastly improved emotional outlook.

When practising Naturopathy it is often impossible to have evidence showing that the attention given to these “small things” will return the patient to health. Instead, a rational and considered plan of actions to promote health is agreed with the patient. Where evidence is available it is used and brought into the discussion. In my experience, patients are happy with this situation. They like an explanation, but do not have unrealistic expectations about “evidence”, since the majority of recommendations made are “common sense” and are fully related to by the individual.

3. Placebo effect and therapeutic relationship between doctor and patient or practitioner and patient are factors in the health equation. As psychoneuroimmunology describes interactions between the mind/body and subjective experience of the individual, the power of positive or negative psychological states on the functioning of the body becomes explicable. A positive and supportive relationship between doctor or practitioner and patient is undoubtedly capable of boosting positive emotions and through these, it probably boosts immune function. (ref: The Lancet Vol 369 March 17, 2007, page 886 and 887 on the “Objectification of Physicians and loss of Therapeutic Power”). Placebo and therapeutic relationship are not “unscientific”.

4. There is considerable evidence available for use in terms of e.g. herbs, foods, nutrients, diets and effects of stress. However, it becomes difficult to gather evidence for the more complex “whole person” approach of Naturopathy. Work is ongoing to determine how to adequately perform such “whole systems research”. The editor of the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, Kim A. Jobst, stated in the November 2006 issue - **‘It is evident that the model of the double-blind randomised controlled cross-over clinical trial not only does not but cannot adequately evaluate the complexity of interaction inherent in complex systems.**

The opportunities and methodological challenges inherent in a whole systems research approach to the study of complementary medicine were the focus of a discussion as part of the North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine. It was published in the November 2006 issue (Volume 12, Number 9) of The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine. The discussion was available free online at [www.liebertpub.com/acm](http://www.liebertpub.com/acm).

Note: Wayne Jonas MD is the director of the [Samueli Institute](http://www.siiib.org) – an independent non-profit organisation that conducts and supports health care research in areas such as patient-centred approaches, healing environments, complementary therapies and traditional medicines. The mission of the Institute is to transform health care through the scientific exploration of healing. See [www.siiib.org](http://www.siiib.org)

5. My impression is that the general public do not have positive feelings about mud-slinging that takes place between advocates of conventional medicine and advocates of natural, alternative, complementary medicine. As stated by Jerome Burne at the last meeting, the readers of “Food is Better Medicine than Drugs” by Jerome and Patrick Holford, were most likely to avoid reading the first chapters about the unpleasantness of the drugs and turn straight to the sections about self-help.

This is something important to bear in mind. Be positive.

Patrick Holford seems to have done more than anyone to popularise nutrition over the past ten years. Walk past the health shop and see his books on display. Good books that are easy to read, understand and use. He has a newsletter and website and uses these to great advantage to tell people the good news – about supplements, diet and exercises etc. latest items of research and often a riposte in response to damaging media articles – all goes to his captive and growing audience. This is positive “people power” and is to be commended. Ultimately, the people are the consumers of healthcare.

6. Evidence-based medicine has its problems. I urge everyone to read **CAM magazine June 2008** for two excellent articles on the subject. One by Ralph Moss PhD on pages 37-38 and another by Dr David K. Cundiff MD on pages 34-36. Access to this magazine is via [www.cam-mag.com](http://www.cam-mag.com) on previous issues.