

The Problem With Prevention

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As the swine flu spreads, there is greater urgency to try and prevent illness. Acupuncture and herbal medicine are natural approaches that support the immune system, reinforcing the body's ability to heal and protect itself. Even though Chinese medicine is incredibly effective at treating disease, it is known to excel at preventive medicine. It does this so well, in fact, there are legends of practitioners who wouldn't get paid if the patient ever got sick. The physician's job was to keep someone healthy rather than be the final option (as alternative medicine is so often used today). With tongue and pulse diagnoses, we have a unique skill set to "see" into the body, recognizing patterns and imbalances before they show up as symptoms.

I've worked in integrative medicine centers across the country. At every place, practitioners voice a desire to work with people to prevent illness. After hearing the horror stories of misdiagnosis, botched surgeries and ineffective pills to treat the side effects of other ineffective pills, it is often easier to try and prevent disease than to treat symptoms.

During case reviews, the practitioners often think, "If we could have treated these people before they got sick, they may have never ended up in this dire health situation." In order for us to really help keep people healthy, we have to shift our thinking about this whole idea of "prevention."

Prevention is based on fear. When we imagine illness as a tree, with roots (the imbalance) leading to a variety of symptoms (branches), the most effective treatments address both the root and branches at the same time. However, prevention plants a seed of fear that has its own roots we have to address. Statements such as "I don't want cancer," and "I don't want heart disease" are counterproductive to long-term wellness.

When we identify what we don't want, instead of focusing on what we do want, we set ourselves up to become victims. We are picking an (imagined) enemy and unconsciously creating the image of ourselves being kicked, punched, beaten, infected and/or knocked out by this foe. We become focused on the future and disempowered. When we see ourselves as a victim, or potential victim, we are put into a reactive mindset. The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated. Prolonged use of the SNS is unsustainable. This reactive mindset is exactly the opposite of the parasympathetic nervous system that is needed to ensure long-term health and balance.

In terms of creating the future we desire, life coaches will often tell their clients to visualize, in great detail, the change they want to see. The same mechanism of the power of the mind and the law of attraction that enables people to manifest powerful positive change is the same mechanism that makes focusing on prevention so dangerous.

The patient who wants to prevent an illness has already mentally given life and possibility to the specific imbalance they are most afraid of. They have played out the scenario of themselves being sick. Even though they say, "I don't want this illness," they spend more time imagining the worst-case scenarios. Fear is not synonymous with health.

Focusing on optimal wellness creates a drastically different landscape in the mind, body and spirit. I encourage my patients to shift from speaking about what they don't want to talking about what they do want. I prefer that they say they want healthy cells, unblocked meridians, open chakras or simply more laughter, rather than diseases they want to avoid. This stops them from invoking powerful agents of fear and imbalance. Now, they inundate themselves with images of health and balance.

For maximum potency, I ask them to refine their wording even further. I ask them to shift from saying, "I want health," to "I am healthy." Being focused on the present moment is empowering, making the mind/body/spirit congruent. The patient is no longer waiting for something to happen in the future. Instead, they embody the change they desire.

I encourage my patients to visualize their mind and body as being composed of a bunch of magnets that have words written on them. Every thought, feeling and desire, conscious or unconscious, creates these magnets. These magnets attract more of whatever is written on it. How powerful the magnets are, or how many we have, is dependent on how frequent and impassioned the thoughts are. "I want _____" attracts more wanting. "I don't want _____" attracts more "not wanting," but not necessarily the actual change. On the other hand, "health" attracts more health.

Despite illusions to the contrary, illness and health happen one moment after another. Staying present-minded, we are best able to make positive and healthy choices right now, not out of fear of illness, but out of love and care for ourselves.

The coverage for this swine virus highlights the problem with the whole idea of prevention. Most people aren't talking about how adequate sleep, reduced stress levels, healthy diet and exercise are some of the best ways to stay healthy. They focus on the symptoms, fear, and scope of the illness.

If we take good care of ourselves from the start, we won't have to be worried about the future. We become less affected by the fluctuations of our environment because our bodies are fortified. Focusing on optimal wellness for each and every present moment leads to greater enjoyment now and creates the momentum of self-care and appreciation that is more likely to keep people healthy for a long, long time.

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