Functional Medicine and the Bodyu2019s Innate Healing

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It is how it works and I think one of my biggest challenges is to help more people understand that. How the Body Works, what an amazingly vital, dynamic, powerful entity the human body is, right?

It is not a harbinger of pathology. No. And we have so medicalized our society that if you do a word association with your average person, if say heart, they're going to say disease.

right? If you say lung, they're going to say cancer. And so we have so medicalized and subsequently pathologized the broader perception of the human body that we are wasting the creative power of minds that need to be directed toward the innate healing power Hello and welcome back to the Evolution of Medicine podcast.

I'm your host James Maskell and we are here at the Institute for Functional Medicine's annual international conference. We are speaking to leaders and speakers here, at this conference, and connecting the community together.

And it is my great pleasure to have back on the show Dr. Gail Christopher, who is the chairman of the board of The Institute for Functional Medicine and is here present in that capacity.

And Dr Christopher is great to see you again.

Dr. Gail Christopheru2019s IFM Journey and Health Equity Work

Thank you. I'm really happy to have you here and to connect again, tell me a little bit about your journey to arrive here as the Chairman of board and oversee the evolution of this organization.

You know, Jeff Bland, the founder, and I were comparing notes. We actually met 50 years ago. No way. So mine has been a very long journey, even prior to the creation of IFM, but grounded in the principles of functional medicine.

And I have come to so many of the gatherings and the conferences, but I am so proud of how we are accelerating the widespread adoption of functional medicine under the leadership of Amy Mack.

And this has been a very moving conference, and it's just wonderful to see the integration of these concepts into pretty much mainstream medicine now.

What role would you credit yourself with with the evolution of this organization since you've been part of it? Well, that's though. a question that we feign humility and say we usually don't speak to that.

My role has been as a leader in social justice and health equity. And my career has spanned clinical practice. I saw tens of thousands of individuals in my clinical And that expanded into designing social programs that had the principles of functional medicine at the heart.

And then ultimately to supporting and advocating for public policies that promoted health equity and seeing amazing changes over the decades, and then philanthropic work which I was a senior advisor and vice president of the W. K.

Kellogg Foundation. And in that role, leading the health work there, I able to direct billions of dollars toward efforts around the country that had the functional medicine essence at the heart.

We increased the amount of access to mother's milk for millions of babies, so that they got off to the right start. we definitely have fought for holistic efforts to address the social determinants.

of expectant mothers, for example. We worked hard to try to get organic and healthy foods into populations that might otherwise not have access to it.

So I took the core ideology and principles of functional medicine and helped to translate them into effective social programs and public policies. Wonderful.

Well, maybe I could just reflect back to you some of the interviews that I've already done in the last couple of days that speak to that transformation.

So whether it be Dr. Carter talking about the continued progress at the Cleveland Clinic, Emily Riddbaum and the grow baby process of taking into mothers on Medicaid.

I just spoke to a doctor who is bringing functional medicine education to their university and their students in Kansas. It speaks to, I think, the widening of the ability of functional medicine to reach into the places where it's needed most.

Scaling Functional Medicine Through Group Visits and Technology

Yeah it does and that is it's wonderful when you have so many decades of work to see the the realization of those visions that the leaders have had when they created this organization and to See at the heart of it the commitment to health and the opportunity to be healthy for all people, you know, that it would not just be viewed as an elite option, if you will, but rather that its widespread and its application, not only to the needs of the individuals, But ultimately to needs our democracy, to need the country.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of this experiment in a multiracial, multiethnic democracy. The issue of the access to quality health, to the opportunity to be healthy, is really at the core of our viability as a nation.

And I believe functional medicine and the work of The Institute for Functional Medicine is a critical component of actualizing that vision. Well, the first time we spoke, I had just written a book on group visits and I was really taken by our conversation because I kind of recognized at that moment that the group visit model might hold the key to personalization at scale.

And one of the things that Dr. Bland talked about today in his session that was moving and interesting for me was the idea that when you first start talking about personalization in the 80s, the sort of direct relationship is like, well, that can never work.

Or even if it does work, it can ever go out to the individual. And yet, here we are with one technology going the way that it has to make things that were unimaginable, imaginable.

but also the emergent nature of the functional medicine movement has allowed people to find ways to deliver personalization to scale through things like group visits that facilitate it to be done effectively inside populations that haven't had access.

That seems something whose time has come, I should say. So I just want to take a minute to talk about the incredible mission partners that we have here at The Evolution of Medicine that have made this possible.

First and foremost, a lot of thanks. So Fullscript has been an amazing partner for 10 years. We only pick partners that can help us achieve our vision and help you achieve your practice vision.

And FullScript have been incredible partner, for a decade, but their new offering journeys, this is why we called it the Evolution of Madison Journeys, is allowing practitioners to combine the relationships that they have with the newest technology to sell direct-to-consumer lab testing and use it as a funnel to bring into your practice and it's a game changer for the whole industry.

So go to goevomed.com slash journeys and you can get started on building the journeys for your practices an optimal way into practice. We're going to have some conversations about it.

This is a Game Changer. Next, Jenova. Janova have been fans of the Evolution of Medicine for a long time. We're big fans with them and they now have a lot more specialty testing.

They have lot of more tools and it's a key part of understanding the body ecologically. So go to goyomed.com slash Jonova to find out more. Come on over here.

I want to show you about the other mission partners. If you've been following us for a while, you know that these are organizations that we trust, that add a lot of value.

Freedom Practice Coaching, I have been supported by them since the beginning. And so many of the issues that practitioners face in building a successful practice, scaling a successfully practice come down to having the right support with people who have done that.

Go to goevomed.com. Big boost marketing, Uli and his team are the best in the business when it comes to really understanding how to market your functional medicine practice.

Go to goevomed.com slash big boost and see how they can help you. And then what you're going to be hearing a lot about is the formation of clinical networks.

Intergenerational Healing and Community Connection

Ultimately, True Neura is our first effort at that, which is to build an integrated clinical network combining independent practices from across the country into a network that can reverse cognitive decline.

And if you go to goevomed.com slash Trinura, you can get a demo. You can see what it means to be part of an integrative clinical networks. That's mentorship, that's software, and that making it easier for you to get incredible outcomes in a disease state where there are no other options.

So thanks to our mission partners. Let's get back to the content. There is no question so much of what is functional medicine in terms of the concepts, the education, right, that lead to the ways of living and the way of being.

The changes that are required, those can be delivered in group settings, Right? The goal is for the empowerment, The agency of The individual, but that is best accomplished, I believe most effectively, in community and group settings.

So I agree with you 100%. When you add to that the technology that enables the monitoring, something as basic as continuous glucose monitoring. then there's ability to share that experience, that data with others.

And I think it's just going to accelerate the adoption and the growth. So the group experience is an integral part of my work over the decades, and I couldn't agree with you more.

What have been some of the sessions that you've attended this year that have spoken to you, spoken your head and spoken it to your heart? Well, I was, all of them have spoken to both, right?

But the last session that they just did a panel where they included some of the older leaders, talking about a purpose-driven life and the wisdom that comes with longevity and aging.

And the questions and the answers were so heart-rooted, right, and, the lessons of life. And, you know, I could have been on that panel and that I'm, had the privilege of a bit of longevity myself so far.

But it was extremely moving to to hear how lived experiences changed the course of people's lives and the lessons that they learned from that and were so authentic and willing to share those lessons.

Because this is a multigenerational audience, right? Half of the participants, this their first exposure to functional medicine. And so I just respected the willingness to bring this intergenerational component Right into the front and center stage the way it was done.

It was it's really quite moving Yeah, right after the the award when everyone's paying attention. Let's talk about let's get into heart of the matter.

Yeah in your work Through the Institute and also more broadly. What are some of ways that you see intergenerational healing occurring and the use or the sort of leverage of wisdom of the elderly population into the youth.

The notion of volunteerism, you know, is really at the heart of client or patient centered work, right? We have some healthcare workforce challenges, particularly when it comes to the diversity of the workforce.

So many persons that are retired, they are eager and willing to volunteer to engage. And usually if that's engagement in our community institutions, then you're going to see the multi-generational approach.

But vice versa, right? As we are an aging population, there aren't enough providers of care. There aren' enough relationships that are critical to well-being.

Building Clinical Networks and Patient Communities

And so we see young people actually volunteering to work with seniors. So what we're doing is building more of a sense of connection and community. We know that that is a factor for health and well being.

I've seen some amazing examples of that, you know, in Europe, where you have the older people with the younger people, younger with older, it seems like we're a little bit behind, but we are catching up.

We are a bit a behind but that's not unusual when it comes to, other than profit motives, driven. activities, but it is catching up. And I think there's something about this moment in time where we are feeling a great deal of turmoil and associated uncertainty and stress.

I thinks it's calling forth our better angels, this notion of overcoming our divides, be they generational or other identities. We're recognizing that we must all hang together or we will surely hang separately.

So I think we are seeing more of this cross-generation work. Well, I think it's part of a great reconnection that has to happen. And it is interesting what I saw Dr.

Bland's slides today that he was really talking about these sort of networks in the body that break down over time. I've been sort-of thinking about functional medicine through the lens of what i would call like network insufficiency, right?

The networks break-down over-time. But one of the reasons why we're so isolated is because the insufficient node, someone who's not connected, is a great buyer of all things.

And when the social fabric is reweaved, you don't need to buy as many things, but you have so many benefits to it. So it seems to me that the biggest part of the transformation of medicine is actually the re-weaving of social fabrics.

There is no question you are 100% correct, I believe, with the exception of the concept of reweaving, right?

Because this country was not founded on an integrated woven fabric, it was founded the perception, the false ideology of a hierarchy of human value and the necessity by policy and by law to separate and to segregate.

So this notion of weaving the social fabric, it's really part of our evolution. It's part our growth. So again, its not a coming back together. Its a transforming into together, which is, you know, age appropriate, I guess, or long overdue for us as a young nation.

I'm feeling compelled to share a vision that I have for the evolution of the functional medicine movement on that exact topic. When you're involved in a pioneering enterprise, there is a will that is required to break free and do things that you wouldn't normally do.

And one of the things I see in the community of practitioners that have chosen functional medicine is the level of will to breakout of conventional medicine start.

But I think the shadow of that movement is that we have Now, over 100,000 generally like individuated practitioners, mainly running their own practice.

You have some larger institutions adopting it, but you have a lot of insufficient nodes in a network that hasn't really been built. And my work, I feel, has always been to start to build those nodes.

So there was the functional forum meetup groups, getting doctors who were thinking about this together to give them the confidence to generate that will to break through.

But one of the things that I see as the next phase in functional medicine is connecting these individual practitioners into what I would call clinical networks, networks of doctors that are capable of reversing chronic illness and derive value from their own interconnectedness.

And I think that that to me makes a lot of sense and I that technologically there are ways to weave those practices into something that could actually meet the moment for the disease that we have in America in a way that individual practitioners possibly can't.

I think your vision is shared to a large measure by the leadership here at IFM. You know, the body of practitioners as it evolves is becoming more networked.

you have more institutional partnerships, you more multi-practitioner organizations. The lone practitioner is not the dominant model as And that's an important part of accelerating the growth, I believe.

AI, Longevity, and Protecting Functional Medicineu2019s Integrity

The other gem that isn't being tapped as well as it should would be the networks of patients, the network of clients who are receiving these services and their lives are being transformed.

They're getting well, right? We're not doing enough to bring those people together as part a sense of community. to amplify their experiences and their voices, and also to engage them on a regular basis in spreading the word about the power of functional medicine.

I think there is a natural ripple effect in communities. When you see someone reverse their chronic illness, they can't wait to tell everyone about it.

Oh, right. The organization of that communication is important and probably has been underfed. But I, I-I think you're absolutely right I made the mistake of bringing out my book about group visits in the middle of the pandemic.

And ultimately, I think there is a shift happening back towards real life experiences, real relationships, face-to-face connection that is sort of a meme happening in society that can accelerate what you're talking about.

Yeah. And we shifted to group visits virtually, right? But there was still this need to be connected. And if you design the virtual group experience in a way that is grounded in the stories of the participants, it's not as good as in person, but it is still human connection, at least from the standpoint of awareness, of individual experiences and shared stories.

Well, I've been part of a case collaboration mastermind for the last year. And we had a meeting on Wednesday night, the night before the show. I saw two clinicians who have only ever met on Zoom going over cases of Alzheimer's and dementia.

That's their only relationship. Bear hug each other like they were best friends. Like they were best friends and it was amazing to see how much cohesion is built in a shared mission, shared stories, you know, share value, shed connection.

And so I think that could happen. That is happening and you can happen more. Tell us a little bit about what you think is next and what your hopes and dreams are for this next era of functional medicine.

Well, you know, our strategic vision that has guided us to this point has been about promoting the widespread adoption of functional medicine and the leadership has helped to move us there.

And now we have to figure out how do we leverage the technology of today, as well as protect the authenticity and the uniqueness of the methodology from exploitation, I believe, by the Technology of Today.

And I'm referring to AI, right? I think it's a misnomer, truly, to call it artificial intelligence. It's simply automated information. To call not fully understand what intelligence is, quite frankly, in my opinion.

That said, it is labeled AI, but it poses the risk of a dilution of the depth and the intellectual integrity of work of any field, particularly of this emerging field or emergent field.

And so part of our challenge is to leverage today's multimedia landscape while at the same time protecting the authenticity and the integrity of the methodology and their approach.

Yeah. Well, that will be an interesting journey to follow along with. You know, we've been following along. I would say it's interesting that technology companies who aren't really associated with functional medicine end up coming to the conclusion of functional medicines, whether they call it that or not, because that is just how the body works.

It is how they body work. And I think one of my biggest challenges is to help more people understand that. How the body works. What an amazingly vital, dynamic, powerful entity the human body is, right?

It is not a harbinger of pathology. And we have so medicalized our society that if you do a word association with your average person, if say heart, They're gonna say disease, right?

If you say lung, they're going to say cancer.

Chronic Disease Prevention and the Future of Functional Medicine

And so we have so medicalized and subsequently pathologized the broader perception of the human body that we are wasting the creative power of minds that need to be directed toward emphasizing, accelerating, envisioning the innate healing power Yeah, no, for sure.

Well, one of the things that's sort of happening alongside, there's technology, but there is also this big longevity movement that is happening. It's got its own word.

Its got it's own name. And I think part of what I tried to do with the Functional Forum was to bring people together who were all interested in salutogenesis.

But it has been interesting to see that there's a lot of doctors that have been sort of brought along on the longevity concept, but the way to have longevity is not to get a chronic illness, right?

To identify where function is going down and to build that function and understand how certain symptoms eventually turn into certain diseases. And it seems like you know, that there's a lot of wisdom in this community that could empower those clinicians who have been sort of brought in through the potential of longevity that may not understand the value of the functional medicine ecosystem, should we say.

You're absolutely right. And one could say from a marketing perspective that there's an expanding market as our population ages. There's a greater demand for care.

While most of our prevention is early detection, the functional medicine approach really does allow us to truly prevent these chronic diseases to truly reverse this epidemic of chronic disease.

My talk is about allostasis, you know, how the body adapts in the face of stress. And if we support those systems of adaptation properly, all of those mechanisms are nutrient dependent.

They are dependent upon movement. takes us out of the stress response and into the parasympathetic vagal response. And so all of these are foundational concepts of functional medicine.

So I couldn't agree with you more in terms of this fundamental principles will help us to reverse this trend toward the burden of chronic disease that's associated with our longevity.

And it will also reduce the cost burden, of our long jacket, longevity and chronic diseases. That sounds like a prescription for radical healing. I believe it, yeah.

You're right. Right about that. Well, look, I just want to say thank you for your leadership here, Dr. Christopher. Thank you. And it's amazing to come back every year.

My favorite thing is to hear functional medicine making into new places where it was never heard. Cool, thank-you. and I think there's more of that this year than I've experienced before.

That, to me, is a good sign that we're on the right track. Well, thank you. It's been a pleasure to speak with you again. Yeah. Take care. This has been the Evolution of Medicine podcast.

We're with the chairman of the board of The Institute for Functional Medicine, Dr. Gayle Christopher. Uh, we will be back with another episode next week from The Institution for functional medicine.

I hope you enjoyed this session. If you did, please share it with a colleague that needs to hear it. Thanks so much for tuning in and we'll see you next time.

So we are here asking practitioners about their practitioner journeys and the reason why is because journeys is a new product from Fullscript. Journeys allows you to set up your own lab offerings as the top of the funnel, give the patients what they want, they wanna know about themselves and it's the easiest way to bring them into your practice.

We have all types of practices from across the country that are building their own unique lab panels for their unique practices selling them to their community and acting as a great funnel into their practice.

This is a massive innovation. I think this will accelerate the evolution of medicine. You can go to goevomed.com slash journeys to find out more, set up your own journeys in half an hour and transform the health of your community.

Go get them. So that was the podcast. What an epic session. Thank you so much for tuning in to the Evolution of Medicine podcast, we'll be back again next week.

And thanks so