

Functional Medicine Update February 2012

Questioning Established Medical Practices in the Age of Personalized Medicine

“How many established standards of medical care are wrong?” That question appears in a January 2012 article published in *JAMA* titled “Reversals of Established Medical Practices: Evidence to Abandon Ship.” Dr. Bland opens this issue of *Functional Medicine Update* with a discussion of this article and the appearance of other writings that are calling into question established practices. If one reviews the history of medicine, it is not uncommon for long-accepted ideas to ultimately be abandoned. Dr. Bland quotes: “Ideally, good medical practices are replaced by better ones, based on robust comparative trials in which new interventions outperform older ones and establish new standards of care. Often, however, established standards must be abandoned not because a better replacement has been identified but simply because what was thought to be beneficial was not. In these cases, it becomes apparent that clinicians, encouraged by professional societies and guidelines, have been using medications, procedures, or preventive measures in vain.” Dr. Bland further expands the discussion by referring to a 2008 article also published in *JAMA* titled “The Conflict Between Complex Systems and Reductionism.” This article also poses questions for intellectual and philosophical consideration: “Most medical treatments make sense based on research of specific molecular pathways, so why do unexpected consequences occur after years of treatment? More simply, does the treatment that addresses a specific disease-related component harm the individual as a whole?” REF #1-2

Statin Use and Risk of Diabetes Mellitus in Postmenopausal Women

Data from the Women’s Health Initiative (WHI) have resulted in many significant and revealing articles in the medical literature over the last decade. An article has appeared very recently (January 23, 2012) in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* that Dr. Bland discusses at length. This analysis, published under the title “Statin Use and Risk of Diabetes Mellitus in Postmenopausal Women in the Women’s Health Initiative,” included 153,840 women participating in the WHI and investigates whether the incidence of new-onset diabetes mellitus (DM) is associated with statin use among postmenopausal women. Researchers used Cox proportional hazards models to estimate the risk of DM by statin use, with adjustments for propensity score and other potential confounding factors. Subgroup analyses by race/ethnicity, obesity status, and age group were conducted to uncover effect modification. Based on the findings, it was concluded that statin medication use in postmenopausal women is associated with an increased risk for DM and that this may be a medication class effect. In his discussion of the article Dr. Bland offers the hypothesis that the relationship could be a result of impaired cellular bioenergetics. REF #3

Clinician of the Month

Kristi Hughes, ND

The Healing Center

819 30th Avenue South, Suite 206

Moorehead, MN 56560

www.thehealingctr.com

The Institute for Functional Medicine

1-800-228-0622

www.functionalmedicine.org

At the Integrative Healthcare Symposium that took place in New York City this month, a functional medicine expert panel described a video of Dr. Bland this way: “Like listening to an orchestra play biochemical jazz.” Panel members included Drs. David Jones, Mark Hyman, Mimi Guarneri, and Kristi Hughes.

What does it sound like when you add strong vocals to Dr. Bland’s orchestra of biochemical jazz? This month Dr. Bland interviews Kristi Hughes, ND, who he describes as “a master clinician, fantastic educator, and a seeker.”

Dr. Hughes grew up in Minnesota and had never even heard of a naturopathic physician by the time she reached college. After a move for school to Portland, Oregon that quickly changed. After being introduced to naturopathy she instantly recognized her path, graduating from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in 1997. So assured of the societal need for naturopathic care and so devoted to it, Dr. Hughes describes her mindset coming out of school this way: “When you do good work, then you have waiting lists.” Her books were full within six weeks of graduation.

Dr. Hughes returned to the Midwest to start her private practice and found a region ravaged by a series of devastating floods, the health consequences of which were only starting to manifest: “The community became sick from molds, mycotoxins, and environmental pollutants. Naturopathy and functional medicine provided solutions for these people.”

In addition to her private practice, Dr. Hughes is now Assistant Director of Medical Education for the Institute for Functional Medicine, the organization she credits with helping her organize her naturopathic education into a practice model that runs efficiently and profitably. Dr. Hughes describes new tools that will be becoming available through IFM in 2012, including a newly revised approach to the Functional Medicine Matrix and the introduction of the Functional Medicine Timeline, a new way of taking a medical history and organizing a patient’s story. She and Dr. Bland also discuss practical suggestions for building or expanding a practice, including adding

support staff and dividing responsibilities to create a space that is beneficial for patients, providers, and staff.

“I want to change the world. I want to bring functional medicine around the world.” Dr. Hughes is on her way to achieving that goal, already traveling throughout the US and internationally to give seminars to practitioners on behalf of both IFM and FirstLine Therapy, a program she actively designed and teaches: “The most important aspect is education, and with education you can conquer the world.” REF #4

References

1. Prasad V, Cifu A, Ioannidis JP. Reversals of established medical practices: evidence to abandon ship. *JAMA*. 2012;307(1):37-38.
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3. Culver AL, Ockene IS, Balasubramaniam R, et al. Statin use and risk of diabetes mellitus in postmenopausal women in the Women’s Health Initiative. *Arch Internal Med*. 2012;172(2):144-152.
4. Witt, Christopher and Dale Featherling. *Real Leaders Don’t Do Powerpoint*. New York: Crown Business: 2009.