shooting the messenger

Illness is always a crisis and the purpose of every crisis is development.

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Do your ailments control you? Do you have an acute ache or ongoing pain? For a lot of us unfortunately, the answer is yes. Whilst we might like to be the authors of our wellbeing and have a happy ending, the reality is many of us are living in a state of dis-ease, and often with a condition that is dominating our lives. Far from appealing, Julie Seamer gives us some insight into how we might better manage this.

While quick-fix pharmaceuticals enable you to feel in charge of any sickness you might experience, avoiding too much disturbance or loss of control, are you really comfortable with the remedy they provide? How much do they affect your back-pocket? How long are you expected to take them, or how long have you been taking them? Are they still as effective as when you first started taking them? Are you having any side effects? Are you fully aware of the side effects that may occur? Have you truly considered how helpful they are to your condition and conducted your own research?

Early in 2016, The Sydney Morning Herald quoted Dr Alex Wodak, addiction medicine specialist and president of the Australian Law Reform Foundation as saying, “prescription drugs are the new heroin.” When Wodak was director of St Vincents Hospital’s Alcohol and Drug Services so many people died from heroin overdoses it was considered a national crisis. But now it seems prescribed opioids are becoming more of a killer than their illicit counterparts.

Yet we don’t see major campaigns working to end this dire situation. From 2009-2015 data from the Coroners Court showed that anxiety medications (diazepam and valium) contributed to more deaths than opioids. Codeine (a weak opioid available over-the-counter and contained within Panadeine and Nurofen Plus) caused more overdose deaths than the strong oxycodone. In fact the government is so concerned about people becoming addicted to codeine, that as of 2018 common painkillers such as Panadeine and Nurofen Plus will require a prescription.

Being masters of our own bodies is a good feeling, especially when what we are taking - whether medication or supplements - are providing relief. But how much time have you given to fully consider the option(s) you have chosen. Have you really just taken the easiest route to the chemist or the health food store?

And OK, so you are maybe not all that happy with what you are taking, but you don’t know what else to do. What you are doing is managing as best you can, trying not to be too hard on yourself, doing what you need to do to “soldier on.”

But there is a fine line between managing symptoms and masking the real issues underlying your condition, and this revolves around resistance. By repeatedly shutting off a pain message, or any state of discord in your body/mind, you are ignoring alerts your body is trying to express to you.

In Victoria more annual death rates are related to pharmaceutical overdoses than the road toll.

Even when it’s partially broken, we seem to seek to block any feedback our body sends us and refuse to allow our biology to become our biography.
In the book *The Healing Power of Illness* the authors suggest that when we are ill we tend to shy away so strongly from enforced changes in our lifestyle that we bring every possible means to bear on making the correction go ... so we can continue undisturbed along our old, familiar way.

From a wholistic viewpoint our un-wellness often presents as polarity and disconnection. Symptoms arguably exist to correct imbalance. If we fail to pause, listen and pay attention to our pain and discomforts, is it no wonder the outcome? Almost always, the result is further disturbances. “The over-active are forced to rest, the restless prevented from moving, the sociable cut off from all contact”.

In chronic stress for example, high levels of cortisol (a steroid hormone that regulates a wide range of processes including metabolism and the immune response) is left to run rampant which often results in exhaustion of the adrenal glands, and an increase in oxidative stress and inflammatory conditions. All of a sudden our body is ageing before its time, all because we haven’t stopped and given it our time!

Further, sickness manifesting from burn-out often co-exists with low oxytocin levels. Oxytocin is known as the “cuddle hormone” because it gives us a sense of belonging.

Without it loneliness can ensue, along with a higher likelihood of depression and drug or alcohol addiction.

Connection is often referred to as an antidote to addiction, so isn’t it ironic and sad that while we are spoilt with instant and far-reaching connectivity through social media, we are inherently more lonely, suffering from growing lifestyle-inflicted disease rates, and feeling more disconnected than ever before.

Our body is our Teacher. It whispers until it has to scream. In most cases life has become too full to allow space for rest, reflection and rejuvenation.
of our body temple. The low percentage of people who will stop work/studies/commitments and have a day of bed-rest at the first signs of a flu reflect this truth. While the idea is enticing, the belief is we simply can’t afford the luxury of time-out. We become our own worst enemies - meanwhile the body continues to present dysfunction or dis-ease if homeostasis isn’t fully restored.

Late last year a Tasmanian surgeon was told by the nation’s medical watchdog AHPRA (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) to stop giving directed nutritional advice to his patients. These were mostly diabetics at risk of amputation due to diabetic related neuropathy - a situation that can, to an extent, be avoided with changed dietary habits.

This surgeon was offering what most of us need - a chance to establish some sense of self-control and positive input into a state of internal disharmony. Purportedly Dr Gary Fettke was given a warning for trying to help people achieve new outcomes in their physiology. He was tired of amputating limbs when he could clearly see there were things his patients could do for themselves to avoid having surgery.

If you were faced with losing a limb would you begin to “own” your sickness and try to get back into the driver’s seat?

The Take Home Message
Any sickness represents an opportunity to learn something about ourselves. Unless we start reconnecting to our bodies, observing symptoms or patterns of illness, and taking the gifts these changed states of being represent, then we only do ourselves a disservice.

Most of us would agree that it takes a village to raise a child. Maybe as adults we should be reminded it also takes a “village” to keep us well. Integrative medicine (IM) combines the best of conventional western medicine with evidence-based complementary medicine and therapies within current mainstream medical practice.

Integrative medicine reaffirms the importance of the relationship between the practitioner and patient and focuses on the whole person. It makes use of all appropriate therapeutic approaches to achieve optimal health and healing.

Reaching out for all possibilities of healing to repair, recover and renew our bodies is surely a sensible way to live. To do this requires being open to connecting not only with ourselves but to those who can help us learn from any health crises.

We are blessed in Australia to have an abundance of practitioners working in many modalities who can support us in the ownership and management of our health needs at a deep and transformative level.

A month of treatment for every year you have had a health problem is what is recommended by the World Health Organisation. So if you have suffered from hay-fever for 6 years for example, it could take another 6 months of concerted effort to truly restore your immune system back to normal. Yes, such consultations and protocols can be long and call for your commitment. Are you ready and willing to make the changes necessary to truly overcome your dis-ease state, or are you content to keep shooting the messenger?