INTERVIEW

The Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine: A Conversation With Mimi Guarneri, President of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine

Interview by Suzanne Snyder

Global Advances in Health and Medicine (GAHMJ) interviewed Mimi Guarneri, MD, FACC, ABIHM, at the beginning of 2014 as the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine broadens its mission and purpose to become the Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine (AIHM).

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GAHMJ: Why the name change?

Dr Guarneri: We chose the name because an Academy is the large umbrella for the work we'll do. So, it is more than a name change—it is broadening our purpose and mission. Let me explain.

The AIHM will bring together the global integrative holistic care community of providers—from advanced practice nurses to MDs to DOs to DCs to NDs to traditional Eastern medicine practitioners. A clinician who touches a life directly and believes in a philosophy of holism is part of our community.

We need the AIHM because of today's changing healthcare climate. One of the issues in healthcare today, as noted by the Institute of Medicine, is that we are spending more money on healthcare and have less health—the math makes no sense. America is finally realizing that while spending has been growing exponentially to \$4.5 trillion, we rank 37th in health outcomes in the world.¹ (For a graphical representation of this, [click here](#).) Something has to change.

There is a call to action here that we are ready to take together. The mission and vision of integrative holistic medicine has always been to prevent disease, relieve suffering, and get to the underlying cause of health challenges. At AIHM, we focus on wellness, not illness. Evidence about the cost-effectiveness of integrative medicine has been emerging steadily for at least 2 decades.

Now, in a climate of change, we are taking a bold step—to transform the way we think about health and healthcare—not just in the United States, but also globally. The process is organic, natural, and thrilling.

We're expanding to serve our holistic care community through education, prevention, research, advocacy, membership, and certification. Our platform is growing from an education and certification platform that was limited to just DOs and MDs to a larger entity that serves the entire integrative health and medicine community.

GAHMJ: Who/what is making this possible?

Dr Guarneri: Three groups of people: a community of healthcare practitioners, consumers who want change, and a gracious funder.

Practitioners make the creation of the Academy possible because of this community of healthcare practitioners who believe in the philosophy of treating the individual as a whole person. The leaders in the United States alone are the American Holistic Medical Association, the American Holistic Nurses Association, and the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. They are uniting behind this powerful vision.

Many consumers are fed up and no longer want to participate in the “ill to the pill” mentality. They are tired of managing the side effects of poly-pharmacy. Of course, we believe in the use of medications, but integrative practitioners believe in getting to the underlying cause and preventing disease in the first place. Every major medical challenge is preventable and not solely dependent on your genes. Your genes are not your destiny, and people are open and ready to hear that fact.

Finally, philanthropists Don and Ruth Taylor of Calgary stepped up in a remarkable way to make everything come together by seeding and endowing the Academy's education endeavor. There is opportunity to expand on that as we engage additional philanthropists who support and believe in our vision.

GAHMJ: What are the big issues you see in healthcare today?

Dr Guarneri: The biggest issue is that we are spending more on health care and the result is a less healthy society. We are spending many dollars that do not result in better patient outcomes. Western medicine is good at acute care but not good at preventive and chronic disease care.

First and foremost, we need to train physicians central to medical training in the United States. Integrative medicine's goal is prevention—to address the underlying cause of disease and put programs and treatments into place that reverse the process.

Dr Mimi Guarneri speaks at a panel at the annual meeting of the ABIHM in November 2013.

The second issue is that we have an unhealthy planet. We have to connect the interrelationship between human health and the planet's health. We need to ask the right questions. Instead of saying, "Let's find a cure for breast cancer," we need to ask, "What are the causes of cancer?"

Our food industry, until the end of 2013, liberally allowed trans-fats in foods. And we still infuse products with high-fructose corn syrup and line cans with bisphenol A (BPA). We are not paying attention to how these things infiltrate our bodies and make people ill. All of these things create a perfect storm in which we have sicker people, spend more money, and have less health.

The solution starts with education and that's at the heart of the Academy's mission. With education, we begin to transform the system. We can provide what conventional medical training is lacking: education that focuses on disease prevention, individualized treatment, and new options for chronic disease management.

Our approach is really addressing what the country needs right now in order to shift from a disease care system to a system that promotes true health. The Academy will provide a community for all integrative holistic healthcare providers—beyond physicians.

These providers from diverse groups are coming together to create this broad community of support for education, research, or anything else that a provider may need. It will be comprehensive and include tool-

kits for nutrition, stress management, practice management, expert information about the legal nuances of the Affordable Care Act, specialized training, and more.

GAHMJ: Have we always needed certification in integrative holistic care?

Dr Guarneri: Yes. The American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine has been certifying physicians in integrative holistic medicine since 2000. We are going to expand our certification and have more offerings beyond MDs and DOs to ensure there are standards to all healthcare providers. We need standards created by experts in the field. That is the role we have played in the field and is the role we are expanding.

GAHMJ: What is happening to the board certification ABIHM test you currently give?

Dr Guarneri: We are changing our certification from a board certification to a complete certification in integrative holistic medicine. Again, that is not limited to MDs and DOs but open to a much larger group of integrative holistic healers. Our scope will be international.

GAHMJ: International? What will that entail?

Dr Guarneri: Our international vision respects cultural differences and offers membership, education, and certification for like-minded people around the world. We

will connect online and in person with our international membership, offering education and certification in integrative medicine. It is completely unique.

GAHMJ: Why did you change your current certification?

Dr Guarneri: We listened to our constituents. Other professionals, like nurses, want certification in integrative medicine. There will be a new board certification in integrative medicine offered by a separate entity that will be for MDs and DOs only. But we are going to the next level to support the entire world of integrative holistic health.

GAHMJ: What courses and certifications will you be offering?

Dr Guarneri: We already have the premiere course in integrative holistic medicine. We will continue to offer this course on an annual basis. The next conference gathering is late October in San Diego. We will be adding advanced courses and modules to complement this foundational course for those who want to go deeper in a particular area.

GAHMJ: Do you see an increase in demand for integrative healthcare?

Dr Guarneri: Absolutely. Remember, integrative holistic medicine treats the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. It recognizes that an individual is part of his or her community. The community, how we live, who we live with, and the planet are all interrelated, are all connected.

We have a community of practitioners who know that the better way is integrative holistic health and medicine. The only thing that has been holding it back is insurance reimbursement because most insurance only pays for disease care. But with changes in healthcare today—with health savings and flexible spending accounts—people are going to have more options. Those options are going to translate into people choosing providers who focus on preventing disease—and that is what we do.

GAHMJ: You say we need a unified platform. What does that really mean?

Dr Guarneri: What it really means is that we are living today in silos. Just as Western medicine has “cardiology,” “dermatology,” and “gastroenterology”—what I like to call the “ologies”—we now have “integrative medicine,” “holistic medicine,” and “functional medicine.” I want to get away from descriptions that create silos.

The vision of the Academy is connecting practitioners to a shared philosophy of treating the whole person as an individual—body, mind, and spirit.

If you believe sustainability must be embedded in everything we do versus something that is just an add-

on, if you believe in the connection between the health of people and the health of the planet, if you believe in preventing disease, if you believe in getting to the underlying causes of disease, if you want to see a healthcare system that really focuses on health as well as treatment, then you need to come with us and be part of this vision.

GAHMJ: Can the Academy help reduce the cost of healthcare?

Dr Guarneri: Yes, because our focus is on prevention and lifestyle changes. It’s empowering people to put the science of health and healing into practice. That link between the science and practice is missing in the United States and we are going to establish that connection. It will absolutely save money because in the United States, for every \$1 spent on prevention and wellness programs, \$5.22 is saved.²

Learn more about the AIHM’s upcoming events and online education at www.AIHM.org.

REFERENCES

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