

The Greening of Healthcare — *How to stay healthy in a Changing World*

“The combined profits for the ten drug companies in the Fortune 500 (\$35.9 billion) were more than the profits for all of the other 490 businesses put together (\$33.7 billion). Now primarily a marketing machine to sell drugs of dubious benefit, this industry uses its wealth and power to co-opt every institution that might stand in its way, including the U.S. Congress, the FDA, academic medical centers, and the medical profession itself.”

– Dr. Marcia Angell
Former Editor in Chief
New England Journal of Medicine

This alarming statistic reveals how increasingly dependent we’re becoming on the idea of a “miracle pill” to cure everything from pain, depression and sexual dysfunction to adult attention deficit disorder. If we examine this closer, it clearly represents all the ways in which many of us have become disconnected from the healing properties of nature and our innate intelligence to deal with life’s challenges. Only 100 years ago, we thrived on the health benefits of whole foods and plant-based medicines, and tuned in daily to the seasonal cycles of nature as guideposts for our most important daily decisions. The greening of healthcare is in our hands as we make choices today to value this path of vitality and wellness, and to honor our role to restore and maintain our personal, environmental and planetary health.

Each day, we are witness to and are part of a period of transformative shifts, sobering climatic changes, encroaching (and potentially dehumanizing) technology, paralyzing levels of daily stress, social isolation, and an abandoning of values. All major systems — educational, political and economic, including the healthcare system — are going through major change. In New Mexico alone, 17% of our population is living at or below poverty line, while 22% do not have access to basic healthcare needs. Addictions, depression, cancer, and autoimmune and environment-related illnesses are at an all time high throughout the U.S. It’s time we each take a serious look at how each of us contributes to the healthcare crisis in our daily lives.

As we re-vision and co-create our future and consider the role of health in our lives, our commitment to personal sustainability is critical to our success. To “sustain” means to keep in existence, to withstand and to support the vitality of life. To sustain ourselves, it is imperative that taking care of our own body, mind, and spirit be our number one priority. From there, everything else will follow.

No magic pill can fulfill this mission; no one can delegate this responsibility or institute this by law. We achieve the greening of healthcare when we take charge of our lives and balance our most important life-values with how we live everyday. This starts by making daily choices that

10 Powerful Questions – A Call to Action

1. What does personal sustainability mean to you? How do you sustain yourself in healthy ways?
2. What is draining your energy on a daily basis and zapping you of your vitality?
3. Are you eating foods that insure a healthy, internal ecology?
4. What are the 3 main ways you’re contributing to your own health?
5. What are the 3 main ways in which you are contributing to the health of the Earth?
6. On a daily basis, what “snooze alarms” do you push that prevent you from living your full potential?
7. Are you aware of the impact of your thoughts, words, and actions?
8. What are the six “values” that bring the most meaning to your life?
9. Are you aging consciously? Or, are you buying into this “youth at all costs” mindset?
10. About what are you passionate? What unique gift do you want to bring to the world?

support us---eating healthy foods, exercising regularly, and most importantly, to clear and redirect our thoughts in a positive and proactive direction.

Our Inner Health and that of the earth reflect each other

With so many well-intentioned individuals working to bring our world into balance, why haven't we reached the point of critical mass in which a shift toward greater global health and harmony can occur? The answer lies not "out there" in the world, but right at home.

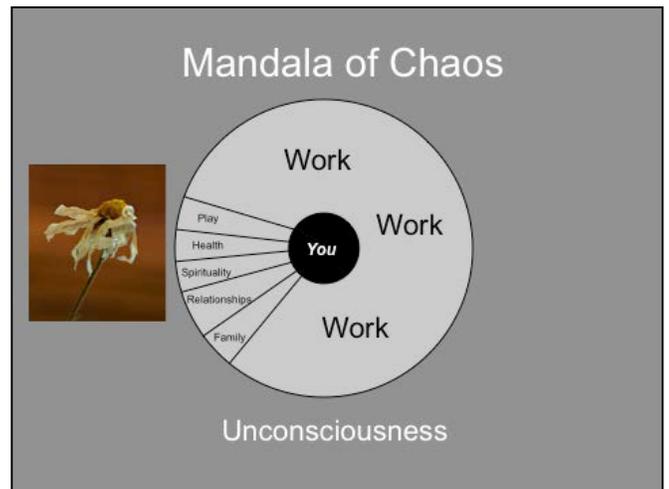
The answer is in our refrigerators. It's in the television and media programming that fills our minds. It is reflected by unused gym memberships and dusty treadmills. It is in prescription bottles that fill our medicine cabinets and drugs that run through our collective veins.

So again, why have we not reached "critical mass"? This is where personal sustainability enters into the equation. Gandhi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world." By practicing personal sustainability, our individual goals merge with the change we want to see in the world. We become the change!

The Mandala of Being

The choices we make each day and how we spend our time are strong indicators of how connected we are with the essence of our being.

The mandala on the right represents the chaos that defines many of our lives. The aspects of life that bring joy and support health are relegated to time left after all the "important" things are finished. Of course, the "important" things are never definitively finished and we are left unfulfilled and unhealthy. Over time, this lifestyle hastens disease, rapid aging, and mental decline.



This mandala exemplifies a balanced life. It shows six significant values that allow an individual to live a fulfilling, self-sustaining life that is rarely overwhelming.

The greatest breakthrough emerging from the present healthcare system is the growth of integrative and complementary medicine. Three-quarters of medical schools now offer programs in complementary alternative medicine (CAM). More than 40% of Americans seek help through acupuncture, biofeedback, energy medicine, hypnotherapy and other CAM modalities. Medical practitioners are beginning to see the value of addressing patients' needs in a holistic manner. Physicians are replacing eight-minute visits with thorough investigations into every single factor that could potentially cause poor health or disease. As a result, the best preventive, natural, and cost-effective measures can potentially be called upon to treat clients. Finally, the heart and soul of medicine can be reclaimed; healthcare can grow green in its own right.

With deeper understanding of interconnectedness, and awareness that one wavelike motion of the web affects the whole, sustainable communities and 21st century healthcare models are developing worldwide. In keeping with its rich history of culture and health, Santa Fe continues to be a leader in the development of holistic-style healing centers, centers for spiritual wellbeing, spas, innovative schools, and living communities. It is thrilling for me to see my two young children learn principles of co-creation, recycling, water conservation, and unity of all life. Meeting in a circle each morning at their public school has reinforced their understanding of conscious communication. We recently participated as a family in a community event to create the school's first garden.

Although we have a long way to go, we're beginning to live in harmony with self, community, and the natural world. This is how we stay healthy in a changing world, how we participate in the greening of medicine: by moving away from the overwhelming dependency on the pharmaceutical industry and toward living sustainably. We can accomplish this if we support our local food-growers and our local economy in general. Every chance we get, we must help to reduce, not increase, our carbon footprint. Every moment of every day holds the possibility of embracing this movement through our choices and actions, big and small.

13 Ways to Achieve Sustainable Health:

1. Make your home energy efficient, toxin-free
2. Practice water conservation
3. Eat organically
4. Rid clutter and give what is useful away
5. Reduce electromagnetic pollution (cell phones, computer use...)
6. Opt out of our nation's bad-mood-food addiction
7. Wherever and whenever possible reduce stress from your life
8. Play often
9. Deepen relationships with people and pets who make you happy
10. Demand clean air and water from your politicians
11. Sing, dance, pray
12. Practice mindfulness
13. Take regular breaks from watching or reading mainstream news

In the end, what matters most?

Did you give and receive love?

Did you live and nurture your divine potential?

Did you learn to be at peace with what is?

Did you learn to live in a harmonious relationship with Mother Earth?

Optimal health and wholeness is not just a personal choice — it is how we change the world!



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Dr. Benson is the founder of Santa Fe Soul Health & Healing Center, as well as a founding member of Emergence Sanctuary & Sustainable Communities. With 20 years of professional experience, she specializes in pain management, women's health, and family medicine.

A knowledgeable acupuncturist and herbalist, Dr. Benson is board-certified in orthopedic and pediatric acupuncture and practices many forms of alternative, progressive internal and preventive medicine.

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