

HELPING PATIENTS MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN WITH INTEGRATIVE PRIMARY CARE

Integrative Primary Care Case Study

Integrative primary care enables providers to help patients treat and understand their pain and become actively engaged in making lifestyle, behavioral and self-care changes to manage their pain.

Integrative primary care is the coordinated delivery of evidence-based conventional medical care, complementary medicine and lifestyle medicine within a primary care practice.

FEATURED PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER



Henri Roca, MD

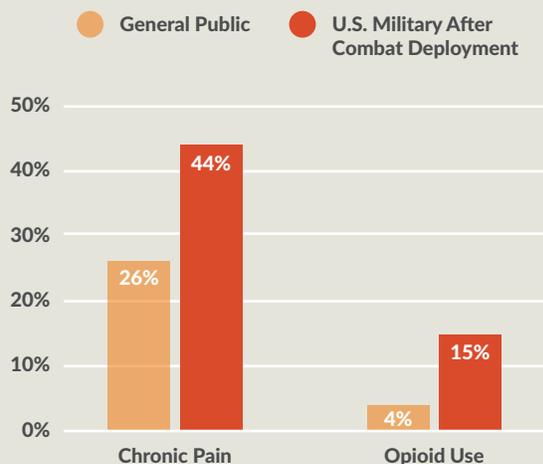
A nationally recognized expert in integrative medicine, Dr. Roca is the program director of the Integrative Medicine Patient Aligned Care Team at the Central Arkansas Veterans Administration Healthcare System.

Dr. Roca developed the Integrative Functional Medicine Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain at the Central Arkansas Veterans Administration Healthcare System.

THE CHALLENGE

Finding Chronic Pain Solutions for Military Personnel and Veterans

Military personnel and veterans experience more chronic pain and use more opioids than the general public. Chronic pain overlaps significantly with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, depression and substance use. All of these conditions are difficult to treat.¹



Source: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health²

Non-Drug Approaches to Managing Chronic Pain

The use and misuse of opioids to treat chronic pain has resulted in increased hospitalizations and deaths.¹ There is an unmet need for non-drug approaches to manage chronic pain among U.S. military personnel and veterans.

America's Largest Integrated Health Care System

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is America's largest integrated health care system, with 1,250 health care facilities serving 9 million veterans each year.

The VHA has made developing better ways to assess, manage and treat chronic pain a

high priority. It is also developing an infrastructure and operations to support an integrative approach to health and healing in general.

THE JOURNEY

Exploring Integrative Approaches to Healing

Henri Roca, MD, first became interested in integrative approaches to healing back in 1982 when he was working as a geologist and paleontologist. While remediating soil and water from petroleum and other chemical contamination, Dr. Roca started to learn and practice integrative medicine modalities including massage, natural products and mind and body therapies.

In 1993, Dr. Roca decided to switch careers and sought to become a physician healer. He enrolled in the Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Medicine. "I wanted to bridge the two worlds of integrative and complementary medicine and conventional medicine," he says. While at LSU, Dr. Roca founded the Complementary Medicine Discussion Group, which created courses in hypnosis, biofeedback and botanical medicine.

Dr. Roca chose a residency program that included complementary and alternative medicine (CAM): Marshall University School of Medicine and Cabell Huntington Hospital in West Virginia. There he worked with Appalachian herbalists and acupuncturists. For the next few years after residency, Dr. Roca cared for patients at federally qualified health centers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and New Orleans. He also became an acupuncturist.

Integrative Medicine Programs

From 2003 to 2013, Dr. Roca created the integrative medicine program at LSU Health Sciences Center and then the Greenwich Hospital Center for Integrative Medicine, which is associated with Yale New Haven Health System. At both locations he provided holistic, integrative, and functional medicine in primary care.

At LSU, Dr. Roca created the Division of Integrative Medicine and added CAM education for medical students and residents. CAM education is now part of several basic science courses. As medical director of the Greenwich Hospital Center for Integrative Medicine, Dr. Roca developed programs for men, women, children, seniors and executives and programs in musculoskeletal rehabilitation, detoxification and stress reduction. Along the way, Dr. Roca became a registered yoga teacher and was certified in mind and body medicine and functional medicine.

About Henri Roca, MD

A nationally recognized expert in integrative medicine, Dr. Roca is a board-certified family physician who practices holistic, integrative and functional medicine. He helps patients achieve their best health by getting to the root causes of illness and focusing on nutrition, movement and mind and body skills to reverse chronic disease or stay healthy. He also uses acupuncture, biofeedback, hypnotherapy, natural products and traditional medicine practices.

Dr. Roca developed the Integrative Functional Medicine Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain at Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System, where he is the program director of the Integrative Medicine Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT). He also sees private patients through One Medicine Wellness Services, LLC.

As the director emeritus of the Leadership and Education Program for Students in integrative medicine on behalf of the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health, Dr. Roca created curricula to develop future leaders in integrative medicine. He is board certified in family medicine and integrative medicine, and is certified in functional medicine by the Institute for Functional Medicine.

“Patients absolutely love integrative medicine. Across the board, people want to be treated as a whole person.”

—Dr. Roca

Patients Respond to Being Treated as Whole People

By 2013, Dr. Roca had used integrative medicine to care for patients ranging from low-income, underserved and usually under-educated rural and inner-city populations to well-educated, well-insured populations.

He found that his patients, regardless of their income, insurance, race or religion wanted to understand why they were sick. And they wanted to do more than take pills to suppress their symptoms.

THE SOLUTION

Envisioning Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

While Dr. Roca was creating integrative medicine programs for the general public in West Virginia, Louisiana and Connecticut, the prevalence of pain among military personnel and veterans was increasing.³

In 2009, the Department of Defense established a Pain Management Task Force to make recommendations for a comprehensive pain management strategy that is

“...holistic, multidisciplinary, and multimodal in its approach, utilizes state of the art/science modalities and technologies, and provides optimal quality of life for soldiers and other patients with acute and chronic pain.”⁴

The task force’s final report called for incorporating integrative therapies into patient-centered care and identifying best practices based on the best available evidence.⁵

Whole Health at the VHA

“A whole health approach

- Places the person at the center of his or her own health care
- Shifts the focus of care toward health and well-being
- Utilizes Mindful Awareness to promote self-care and healing
- Emphasizes the importance of relationships and partnerships
- Incorporates a range of conventional and complementary approaches”

Source: [VHA Pain Management for Providers - Whole Person Pain Care](#)

In 2012, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health began to encourage research on the use of complementary and integrative approaches to pain in military personnel and veterans.⁶

Treatment for Chronic Pain in Primary Care

As part of the VHA's integrative approach to pain management, Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS) wanted to use an integrative, whole health approach within primary care to help veterans understand and manage their chronic pain.

CAVHS was looking for an expert who could create a primary care program for chronic pain. "They wanted someone to be truly patient-centered—not just to give patients more pills and procedures, but to really try to help the individual veteran understand what may be driving his or her pain and, wherever possible, reverse the pain with as natural a means as possible," said Dr. Roca.

In 2013, Dr. Roca joined CAVHS and began to develop the Integrative Functional Medicine Program for Chronic Pain. At the time, CAVHS was using a few complementary therapies: mindfulness in mental health care and yoga and Trager therapy (a form of bodywork) for patients with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Integrative and Functional Medicine Helps Veterans Heal

The Integrative Functional Medicine Program for Chronic Pain combines Integrative and Functional Medicine. CAVHS launched the program in 2014.

Functional Medicine

"Functional Medicine determines how and why illness occurs and restores health by addressing the root causes of disease for each individual."

- [The Institute for Functional Medicine](#)

Integrative Medicine

"Integrative medicine is the coordinated delivery of conventional medicine combined with evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) designed to enhance health and wellbeing."

- [Developing an Integrative Health Model: Who, What, and How, DrWayneJonas.com](#)⁷

Like the VHA's Whole Health approach, functional medicine places the patient as the center of his or her own health care. Functional medicine also focuses on using the patient's life story to understand the root causes of illness—not just the diagnosis.

"The individual's story is paramount," says Dr. Roca. "It is extremely important to hear not only what the individual veteran is concerned about, but also his or her life history."

Going beyond suppressing symptoms requires identifying and treating the root cause of the illness. Those root causes of illness stem from the interactions among genes, environment and lifestyle.

“The only way through the experience of chronic pain is to be engaged in self-care that improves your foundational levels of health. This is the essence of functional medicine.”

—Dr. Roca

The Role of Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

Integrative primary care for chronic pain uses four qualities of high-value integrative primary care:

- **Expanded access to care:** Care is available when needed with fewer barriers.
- **Integrative health care:** The coordinated delivery of conventional medicine combined

with evidence-based complementary and lifestyle medicine is designed to enhance health, healing and wellbeing.

- **Patient engagement in care decisions:** Providers and patients work together to optimize health and wellbeing. The provider identifies the patients' values and goals for healing and offers evidence-based conventional, complementary and lifestyle medicine and support to help patients meet their goals.
- **Comprehensive primary care:** Providers add evidence-based CAM and lifestyle medicine practices and providers to conventional care. For some practices, such as mind and body practices and safe supplements, providers offer the care themselves. For other practices, such as acupuncture or nutritional counseling, they bring in CAM providers or other clinical or non-clinical staff (e.g., nutritionists) to provide services.

High-Value Health Care for Payers

High-value integrative primary care enables providers to respond to incentives that reward high-value health care from Medicare and other payers.

 **34%**
LOWER SPENDING

High-value practices compared to average value practices.⁸

Characteristics of High Quality Integrative Primary Care

1. Expanded access to care
2. Integrative health care
3. Standing orders and protocols

4. Upshifted staff roles
5. Careful selection of specialists, including specialists in complementary medicine
6. Decision support for evidence-based medicine
7. Patient engagement in care decisions
8. Comprehensive primary care

[Learn more](#) about each quality.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

Creating an Integrative Pain Program in Primary Care

The Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain at the CAVHS operates on two levels:

1. Providing comprehensive integrative and conventional primary care and pain management services for Dr. Roca's primary care patients who have chronic pain.
2. Providing consultative integrative pain management services in collaboration with the patient's primary care physician. These patients see both Dr. Roca and their primary care physician.

Dr. Roca provides full health consultation services and works with each patient to determine his or her appropriate care. Those services are all available at CAVHS.

Groups Focused on Patient Activation and Self-Care

Due to the large demand for integrative primary care services for chronic pain, Dr. Roca developed a group-based program focused on patient activation and self-care. Patients develop the skills and confidence to become actively engaged in their health care and get help and support in making lifestyle, behavioral and self-care changes.

Introductory Session

Patients start by attending a two-hour introductory group session that provides an overview of integrative and functional medicine for chronic pain. If they decide to participate in the program, they receive group health coaching to learn skills to help them relieve or reverse chronic pain. The health coaching focuses on movement, nutrition and mindfulness. Health coaching lasts nine weeks, and has weekly sessions.

Next, patients can choose from the more advanced group programs such as Living Well With Pain, in-depth nutrition programs, sleep programs, yoga or tai chi. Dietitians, psychologists, nurses, yoga teachers and other experts lead the groups as part of a VHA program called Whole Health. Patients may also be referred to individual treatments such as acupuncture, chiropractic or biofeedback.

“We live in a system and culture that breeds illness. If we want to reverse, and not just manage, chronic pain, we have to return to health-giving behaviors.”

—Dr. Roca

Throughout the program, patients are actively engaged in self-care. “We are empowering our patients to return to a better place of health,” says Dr. Roca.

Integrative Services for Chronic Pain

The Integrative Functional Medicine Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain offers the following integrative services:

- Acupuncture, battlefield acupuncture and dry needling
- Biofeedback
- Hypnotherapy
- Chiropractic care
- Mind and body approaches
 - » Acceptance and commitment therapy
 - » Cognitive behavior therapy
 - » Mindfulness
 - » Mindfulness-based stress reduction
- Functional nutritional counseling
- Physical therapy
- Stress management
- Yoga, Tai Chi and other movement interventions
- Other mental and behavioral health support

Benefits of and Evidence About Integrative Care for Chronic Pain

The Integrative Functional Medicine Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain at CAVHS has been collecting data and has some initial observational results.

Veterans have increased physical and mental/emotional wellbeing after completing the program and believe they can continue to improve their health and wellbeing. The [Personal Health Inventory](#), a patient self-assessment and self-reflection tool, is used to provide personalized, proactive, patient-driven care (using the Whole Health Model) and to measure change.

Veterans who practice self-care have fewer visits to physicians.

Nutritional counseling and yoga are the most effective treatments according to Dr. Roca. The anti-inflammatory diet (including the [Mediterranean diet](#)) is the foundation of nutritional recommendations.

A clinical trial conducted at the VA San Diego Healthcare System found that yoga improved health outcomes for veterans with chronic low back pain. The study involved practicing yoga twice weekly for 12 weeks. Veterans who practiced yoga had less pain after 12 weeks and six months than those who did not.⁹

Evidence About Complementary Health Approaches for Chronic Pain

Little data about the efficacy of complementary medicine for chronic pain in military populations is available, according to the National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health. Research, however, is currently being conducted.

However, evidence about complementary medicine approaches for chronic pain from the general population can be extrapolated to military populations. “The scientific evidence suggests that some complementary medicine approaches may provide modest effects that may help individuals in the general population manage the day-to-day variations in their chronic pain symptoms,” says the National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Health.¹⁰ The Center also notes that the evidence is only based upon a few studies.

“Integrative medicine is the best path to get us to the goal of empowering patients to return to a better place of health.”

—Dr. Roca

Evidence About Self-Care

The Active Self-Care Therapies for the Pain Working Group, run by the Samueli Institute, conducted a comprehensive set of systematic reviews on self-care and integrative approaches for pain. The working group recommended the following several self-care treatments as effective for alleviating chronic pain in 2014:

- Yoga
- Tai chi
- Music therapy¹¹

The working group also noted that there was insufficient evidence about more than 10 other self-management approaches, and that more research and more rigorously designed research was needed.¹¹

The VHA Pain Management Self-Care web page states: “Active therapies such as movement, stretching, relaxation, and mindfulness help those with chronic pain respond in the most helpful way.”¹²

Challenges in Implementing Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

1. **Making a commitment to integrative primary care for chronic pain.** Practicing integrative primary care requires a commitment to providing patient-centered, personalized care and a willingness to learn a different way of practicing medicine. Physicians will need to continue their current work while moving into integrative primary care. “There’s no easy way to do this,” says Dr. Roca.
2. **Creating an integrative program for chronic pain within primary care.** Dr. Roca was able to do this because leadership at the national VHA and CAVHS supported integrative approaches to pain management with a strong primary care focus. Outside of CAVHS, Dr. Roca says that integrative programs for chronic pain within primary care are rare. Within the VHA, for example, other hospitals and clinics have added integrative medicine services for pain management. Offering integrative pain management services within primary care is much rarer. There are a few programs in the Department of Defense, such as at Ft. Belvoir Community Hospital in Virginia.

3. **Persuading other physicians to accept and embrace the use of integrative services for chronic pain within primary care.** Conventional practitioners will usually accept the use of integrative services if they understand the benefits to patients. “This is a way to extend what conventional practitioners offer their patients,” says Dr. Roca. For the naysayers, Dr. Roca suggests sharing existing data and encouraging patients who have reversed their pain to share their stories.

Financial Implications of Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

“Integrative medicine is our single best chance to reduce the burden on our health care system and the cost of health care to the overall economy.”

—Dr. Roca

Integrative primary care for chronic pain has the potential to provide substantial financial benefits to the U.S. health care system and to society. “Transforming the overall health system from one that focuses on symptoms, medication and highly technological interventions into a system based on self-care and creating a firmer foundation for health will ultimately save the system tremendous amounts of money,” says Dr. Roca.

Studies on financial benefits to primary care providers are limited. However, using [group visits](#) as CAVHS does, offers clinical, financial and operational benefits.¹³

Increased Job Satisfaction

Physicians who practice integrative primary care for chronic pain can experience reduced burnout and improved job satisfaction according to Dr. Roca. When physicians start to understand their patients as people rather than as a “conglomeration of symptoms,” they can “practice the kind of medicine they always wanted to practice and help their patients achieve their best health,” he says.

Getting Started in Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

The easiest way to start exploring integrative medicine, according to Dr. Roca, is to ask patients with chronic pain to share their

- Health goals
- Experiences with complementary and lifestyle approaches

“Shift the conversation from symptoms and pills to health and life,” says Dr. Roca. “Ask patients what matters to them, and why they want to be healthy. Find out what they think they can do to move toward better health. Ask them when they last felt perfectly well.” Also ask patients about complementary and lifestyle approaches they have used or considered using.

Use the Right Tools to Consider and Discuss Health Goals

Two tools to help patients consider their health goals and guide discussions are

- The [HOPE Note](#), a patient-guided process that identifies the patient's values and goals in life and for healing so the physician can assist the patient in meeting those goals with evidence and other support. This tool from DrWayneJonas.com includes resources for providers and patients.
 - » Read the case study on the [HOPE Note](#).
- The [Personal Health Inventory](#), a patient self-assessment and self-reflection tool.

Conversations with patients will help physicians understand what each patient is ready to do in terms of self-care, and determine which complementary and lifestyle approaches to consider offering and how to do this.

Ways to Add Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

Health coaching and group visits, both used by the Integrative Functional Medicine Primary Care Program for Chronic Pain at CAVHS, are two ways to add integrative services for chronic pain in primary care:

- Health coaching helps patients understand their healing options and actively participate in their care. Coaches support patients in developing and following action plans for healthier behaviors. Health coaching has clinical and operational benefits and contributes to integrative primary care.
 - » Read the [case study on health coaching](#).
- Group visits enable physicians to work with patients in a supportive group environment to manage chronic diseases. They offer clinical, financial and operational benefits, and contribute to integrative primary care.
 - » Read the [case study on group visits](#).

Choose a Model for Integrative Primary Care for Chronic Pain

Physicians should also decide whether to

- Refer patients to complementary and lifestyle medicine practitioners
- Obtain additional training in complementary and lifestyle medicine
- Refer patients for some services and provide others

Referring patients to integrative services is the easiest model. "Identify a suitable licensed provider by evaluating their training and credentials, their approach to the specific problem your patient has, and patient cost," says Dr. Jonas in [Developing an Integrative Health Model: Who, What, and How](#).

"Ask patients which practitioners they are most impressed with."

—Dr. Roca

Resources on Effective Treatments for Chronic Pain

DrWayneJonas.com offers the following resources on integrative approaches for pain management:

[Provider Pocket Guide – Therapeutic Yoga](#)

Therapeutic Yoga Pocket Guide gives providers and patients the information they need when advising patients to seek out yoga.

» [Download the guide](#)

[Provider Pocket Guide – Nutritional Counseling](#)

Nutritional Counseling Pocket Guide gives providers and patients the information they need when advising patients to seek out nutritional counseling.

» [Download the guide](#)

[Provider Pocket Guide – Mediterranean Diet](#)

Mediterranean Diet Therapy Pocket Guide gives providers and patients the information they need when advising patients to seek out a new diet plan.

» [Download the guide](#)

[Pocket guides](#) are also available on

- Depression
- Moving meditations (mind and body practices)
- Chiropractic

Having personal knowledge of complementary and lifestyle medicine providers is best, either based on patients' experiences or the physician's experience. "Not all complementary and lifestyle medicine practitioners are equal. Some will be outstanding and some will not," says Dr. Roca.

Training in yoga and functional medicine are especially useful according to Dr. Roca, who is a registered yoga teacher and an acupuncturist, and is certified in mind and body medicine and functional medicine. Yoga training covers mindfulness, guided imagery and visualization as well as movement.

Certification in functional medicine helps physicians shift away from the traditional symptom and diagnosis approach to an approach that empowers patients and practitioners to work together to address the underlying causes of disease and promote optimal wellness.

THE INTEGRATIVE HEALTH MODEL

Integrative health is the pursuit of personal health and well-being foremost, while addressing disease as needed with the support of a health team dedicated to all proven approaches—conventional, complementary, and self-care.

Optimal health and well-being arises when we attend to all factors that influence healing, including:

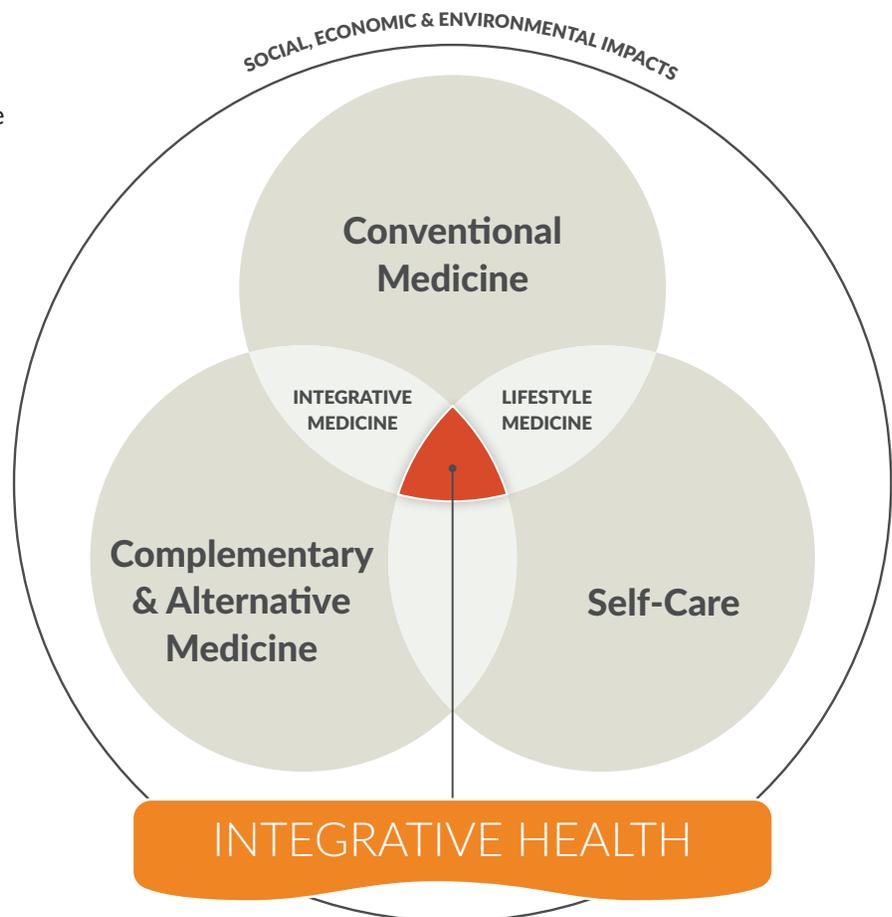
- Medical treatment
- Personal behaviors
- Social and emotional dimensions
- Mental and spiritual factors
- Social, economic, and environmental determinants of health

Integrative medicine is the coordinated delivery of evidence-based conventional medical care, complementary medicine, and lifestyle medicine for producing optimal health and well-being.

Integrative primary care is the coordinated delivery of evidence-based conventional medical care, complementary medicine, and lifestyle medicine within a primary care practice.

Lifestyle medicine incorporates healthy, evidence-based self-care and behavioral approaches into conventional medical practice to enhance health and healing.

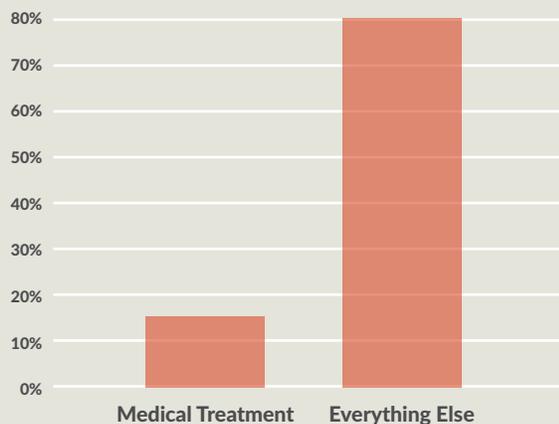
Integrative health redefines the relationship between the practitioner and patient by focusing on the whole person and the whole community. It is informed by scientific evidence and makes use of all appropriate preventive, therapeutic, and palliative approaches, health care professionals, and disciplines to promote optimal health and well-being. This includes the coordination of conventional medicine, complementary/alternative medicine, and lifestyle/self-care.



Improve Care Quality and Patient Outcomes and Satisfaction

Incorporating integrative medicine into mainstream primary care practices enables physicians and other health care providers to:

- Deliver higher quality care
- Improve patient outcomes and satisfaction ¹⁴
- Lower costs
- Reduce burnout



Balance Healing and Curing in Chronic Diseases

As currently practiced, modern medicine, which is so powerful in treating acute disease, is missing nearly 80 percent of what contributes to healing for chronic disease. Even optimal medical treatment contributes only 15 to 20 percent to the health of a population.¹⁵

The rest comes from:

- Lifestyle and behavior
- Environment
- Social determinants of health¹⁵

Integrative health balances healing and curing. It goes beyond treating disease to helping patients thrive by tapping into their inherent healing capacity.¹⁵

Guide Patients on their Healing Journey

Integrative health starts with the physician or other primary care provider listening to the patient to understand his/her needs and values. Providers then match the patient's goals with good practices to promote healing and improve health and well-being.

Ways to Guide Patients

- Promote lifestyle, behavioral, and self-care changes
- Promote proven conventional practices and proven complementary practices
- Protect patients from dangerous, disproven, or toxic practices
- Permit practices that may work and have no harmful side effects
- Partner with patients. Be willing to research and discuss the evidence for conventional, complementary, and self-care.

THE RESOURCES

Resources about integrative services for pain management

- [VHA Pain Management for Providers](#), website with up-to-date information and resources for health care providers who care for veterans and others with chronic pain.
- [VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guidelines, Management of Opioid Therapy \(OT\) for Chronic Pain](#) (2017)

Resources about other qualities of Integrative Primary Care

- [A Return to the Craft of Healing With Patient-Centered Team-Based Care: Integrative Primary Care Case Study](#)
- [Chronic Disease Management With Group Visits: Integrative Primary Care Case Study](#)
- [Helping Patients With Chronic Diseases and Conditions Heal With the HOPE Note: Integrative Primary Care Case Study](#)
- [Empowering Patients With Chronic Diseases to Live Healthier Through Health Coaching: Integrative Primary Care Case Study](#)

Resources about Integrative Primary Care

- [What is Integrative Primary Care?](#)
- [Best Practices in Integrative Primary Care: White Paper](#)
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR – DR. WAYNE JONAS

Dr. Jonas is a practicing family physician, an expert in integrative health and health care delivery, and a widely published scientific investigator. Dr. Jonas is the Executive Director of Samueli Integrative Health Programs, an effort supported by Henry and Susan Samueli to increase awareness and access to integrative health. Additionally, Dr. Jonas is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Medical Corps of the United States Army. From 2001-2016, he was president and chief executive officer of Samueli Institute, a nonprofit medical research organization supporting the scientific investigation of healing processes in the areas of stress, pain, and resilience.

Dr. Jonas was the director of the Office of Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) from 1995-1999, and prior to that served as the Director of the Medical Research Fellowship at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians.

His research has appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Nature Medicine*, *Journal of Family Practice*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, and *The Lancet*. Dr. Jonas received the 2015 Pioneer Award from the Integrative Healthcare Symposium, the 2007 America's Top Family Doctors Award, the 2003 Pioneer Award from the American Holistic Medical Association, the 2002 Physician Recognition Award of the American Medical Association, and the 2002 Meritorious Activity Prize from the International Society of Life Information Science in Chiba, Japan.

To access more information on integrative health, including tools and resources for patients and providers, visit DrWayneJonas.com

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