I had the pleasure of attending the Integrative Medicine for Mental Health (IMMH) annual conference recently. I have been to two of them in the past few years. There are about 400 attendees and it occurs over a four-day period. The philosophy of the group is that mental health, just as physical health, deserves a holistic approach involving multiple organ systems, physiology, nutrition, hormones, detoxification, and biochemistry. The unfortunate truth is that the brain is fully integrated into the rest of the body, which is a fact that conventional psychiatry has apparently missed. With their simplistic reductionist approach: the idea that all you need to do to treat depression is an “anti-depressant” or all you need to treat anxiety is an anxiolytic, or all you need to treat psychosis is an anti-psychotic pill. A pill for every ill. Could it get any simpler? As Einstein said: “Everything should be made as simple as possible but not simpler.” Conventional psychiatry has made these problems way too simple and they have achieved the expected results, which for the most part are horrible.

Any objective look into the effects of psychotropic drugs used long term shows the same thing - a worsening of symptoms and quality of life. Not good news for the quick fix mentality of our population. Robert Whitaker’s book, *Anatomy of an Epidemic* shows how psychotropic drugs re-set the receptor sensitivity and density of whatever neurotransmitter is being targeted, so either a lifetime dependence on these drugs results or increased susceptibility to the same symptom occurs if the drugs are withdrawn (which is almost impossible to do). Schizophrenia was usually a one-time event treated with hospitalization or frontal lobotomy (as horrible as that sounds and was) before the advent of thorazine. Once the easy fix was in with the dopamine blocker, thorazine, the natural history of schizophrenia was changed from being impossible to do. Schizophrenia was usually treated with a one-time event.

Eventually, however, the public and some courageous physicians see that we are losing the war against mental illness and many of the battles, so an alternative approach has evolved. This is what the IMMH Conference is about. There were lectures on detoxification, diet, exercise, organic acids, a multimodal approach to Alzheimer’s and dementia, sauna, infectious diseases, etc. There is no question that this approach consumes a lot of time, money, and energy; but there is one difference between it and the conventional approach. It works. Small detail.

Dr. William Shaw from The Great Plains Laboratory gave several talks as did Dr. James Greenblatt, Dr. Dale Bredesen, Dr. Felice Gersh, and many others. There are people thinking about this deeply, which is a refreshing change from the pill pushers. Dr. Bredesen’s new book, *The End of Alzheimer’s* seems to be getting some traction. I fear the level of care required will be too high for most people to understand or comply with; but for the motivated few, it will work if applied early enough. It’s a basic functional medicine approach for the most part, but there are some specific nuances taught at this conference as well. I have to acknowledge the practitioners who have patients willing to try regimens like this and the patience to explain them, follow them, and study the results. It’s truly groundbreaking. The good thing though is that this approach will have side benefits instead of side effects, which could include cancer prevention, cardiovascular disease prevention, and longevity. I truly hope the IMMH Conference can become more mainstream and increase its popularity among the front-line mental health practitioners.