

# A Consumer's Guide to Selecting a Holistic/Integrative Medical Doctor

*How to Get It Right the First Time,  
Save Money, and Achieve  
the Extraordinary Level of Health You Deserve*



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# *The Right Patient + The Right Doctor:*

## *A Recipe for Success*

Before I begin, I want to commend you on the journey you are undertaking, namely, seeking a path to deeply vibrant health through integrative or functional medicine. This is the road less travelled. It is for people who are open-minded, who think carefully, who know that there is more to health than simply taking medicines to correct or suppress symptoms, more to good health than the absence of an identifiable, name-able disease. You are the kind of patient who wants to understand, who will be a wonderful partner with the doctor you select, in word, the kind of patient with whom any good doctor would enjoy working.

Selecting that doctor is not a simple task. There are so many fields of holistic medicine, so many approaches and treatments. Some doctors offer low prices, higher prices, practitioners have different educational backgrounds, and differing levels of experience. There is lots of online information, ads, reviews; how on earth does one choose a physician who will do the **whole** job and do it **well**?

This guide is a blueprint to show you the potential mistakes and misconceptions and help you to (thoughtfully) make the right selection the first time around.

## *A Message from the Author, Robin Ellen Leder, M.D.*

Mistakes or false starts in your medical treatment can be costly. Reading this carefully will help.

One of my colleagues, Ronald Hoffman, coined the term for this type of medicine that I absolutely love, better than all others (and there are many). He calls it “Intelligent Medicine,” and that means medicine done properly, thoroughly, thoughtfully, comprehensively, compassionately, and with all attention to the patient as a WHOLE. So, it is only “intelligent medicine” when provided by an “intelligent (in this deep sense of the word) physician.” A lesser provider or practice will not yield the results you have read about. And now, for the moment, it is your job to make your selection as an “intelligent consumer.”

In this guide, I have covered the key issues that I have encountered over my years of experience, and the concerns that patients have raised over time. If you need additional help or have questions not covered in this guide, I invite you to contact my office at 201-525-1155 for further assistance.

Now, read on my friend...

To your excellent health, always-

*Robin Ellen Leder, MD*

## 3 Warning Signs That a Holistic Office May Not Be "The One"

1.) **Very low initial price.** Holistic medicine is just that: it is medicine. It is *not* a retail commodity. A good program is one made specifically for you. If a practitioner has some immediate pre-set program to sell, that's not medicine.

One related issue comes up often: "Is the doctor in-network?" When a doctor goes "into network," he or she turns over part of their ability to make medical decisions, order tests, and treat, to an insurance administrator. Time with a patient is limited by reimbursement considerations and testing is restricted. Really thorough holistic medicine simply cannot be done in this way. In my own office, I have made every effort to work with patients to accommodate their finances realistically. I want everyone to be able to afford this medicine if they believe in it and see its values. But working "in-network" is a "red flag", even with a well-intending doctor. "In-network" and "thorough" are not a comfortable mix!

2.) **Limited vision and exaggerated claims.** No office stands alone or should. There are many modalities in the holistic world. It would take an enormous, unwieldy, single practice to provide all things to all people. A practitioner should be open to things he doesn't provide himself, and to working with and referring to others. In this respect, this is no different than in the traditional medical world. Would you want an orthopedist to treat your psychiatric

complaints, or to refer you to a colleague who specialized in this and did it all the time?

Anyone who says that their approach or program is the “last word,” is not the “global thinker” you seek. If this type of practice doesn’t have the answer for you, do they say there may **be** no answer? (Never accept that!) Or do they continue to upsell their own services although you need something beyond? A very bad sign!

**3.) Treatment not based on adequate testing.** Back in the day, the great doctors worked without tests, and I am sure that, amongst the best, their intuition must have been remarkable. I’ve been in the field long enough to have heard such miraculous stories and I am humbled. But today, very insightful, accurate testing is available to investigate many aspects of body chemistry. Although each holistic field has their own specific tests and treatments, licensed medical doctors have the greatest variety and depth of tests available to them, more so than the other fields. To proceed without a strong test panel in this day and age would be akin to a coal miner proceeding without a headlamp: needlessly blind and potentially dangerous. Don’t run from tests. Demand them! Take full advantage of what is available. You do have the right to ask your physician why tests are being ordered and what he expects to learn from them. Once you understand the reason for the test, you should always have the right to proceed with or refuse a test. You are building a relationship with a doctor. You are in a team with him and this teamwork should be encouraged. If not, you should be looking elsewhere for the right physician. As Sachin Patel, a functional practitioner says, “The doctor of the future is the patient.”

# The Scope of Your Program:

## How Much is Too Much?

You have been looking for answers to your concerns. What is leading you to seek a holistic physician? Some of the most common reasons include:

- **Medications** are causing side effects, now or predicted. Or you just don't like the idea of taking pharmaceuticals to mask your problem.
- **No solutions/not a real problem:** You have not found any useful solution to your concerns or the solutions you found are limited. Even worse, you may have been told that there is no problem, and you should rest or see a psychiatrist. As far as medicine goes, you have "no condition" and you are "fine." But you don't feel fine.
- **Vibrant health/longevity** You have decided that you want to improve your level of health and/or want to take measures to live longer.

All of these concerns go beyond the traditional medical models, i.e., you have an identifiable disease, treat it with surgery or a pill.

Since the concern goes beyond the traditional, so **MUST** the approach to your concerns! Your medical status/wellness is a product of many different factors:

- Genetics
- Environment
- Lifestyle
- Diet and digestion
- Infection/inflammation
- Attitude/Outlook
- Connection to Community/family
- Spirituality

All of these factors work to affect you at the deepest level, affecting every cell, every organ, and ultimately how you "feel" and your lifespan. All of your body

systems are interconnected intimately and a misfire or failure at the cell level and/or in any organ system has the potential to cause disruption in the whole organism, namely you!

Considering your motivation, ask yourself this: does the practice offer a wide variety of modalities, specifically those you need?

- 1) **Nutritional counselling:** Be it diets to lose or gain weight, or to work in tandem with other therapies to heal an issue, nutrition's role is critical. If weight loss is one of your goals, you should know if the diets that intrigue you are available.
- 2) **Detoxification** The Garden State is quite a toxic garden. Heavy metals and pesticides abound. Treatments and counselling in detoxification and less toxic lifestyles are essential to get and stay at your best level of health.
- 3) **Food sensitivities** Quest and LabCorp don't do these tests. Food-related blood tests are not necessarily useful. A simple blood test can revamp your life and health by weeding out immune-system-offenders. But only if the office you choose uses that simple test.
- 4) **Non-traditional medical treatments that go outside the box:** What comes to mind in this regard first, are treatments for thyroid and adrenal issues, which are often left half treated or overlooked in the traditional medical model.

So! You should not accept a quick fix with nutrition or a few supplements substituted for medicine. The real answers you want require time and patience, and a logical, step-wise look at as many areas of your "body chemistry" and lifestyle as possible.

A solid functional approach addresses all of the following information:

- 1.) **Medical history** A very detailed, thoughtful, interaction. This provider sets the roadmap for your investigation.
- 2.) **A thorough physical exam**
- 3.) **A review of your medications**
- 4.) **Extensive investigation of body chemistry**
- 5.) **Assessment of toxicity and detoxification**



- 6.) **Evaluation of gastrointestinal health:** The GI system is the site for assimilation of nutrients, absorption of nutrients, and drainage of toxins via the lymphatics. No one, but no one, regardless of their complaints or medical issues, can be truly healthy without a healthy GI tract.
- 7.) **Psychological factors and stress:** Stress can mimic every single medical disease and can actually cause many of them or aggravate them. In many cases, this is the missing link to good health.
- 8.) **Lifestyle: Diet, sleep, and exercise:** Routinely, these prove to be the “prescriptions” that will make the difference when medicines fail.
- 9.) **Spirituality:** What we believe has a profound influence on what we are, how we live, and on the outcomes of our programs and lives.
- 10.) **Comprehensive review of lab tests:** Liberal use of lab testing may well highlight unexpected issues detectable in the body chemistry. As all cells and all systems function interactively, we must “leave no organ behind” in creating whole, grounded, mindful health. Leaving a recognized problem “for later” may cause the downfall of the whole, be it sooner or later. This quote from composer Frederic Chopin says it all so eloquently: “Every difficulty slurred over will be a ghost to disturb your repose later on.”

# The 3 Phases of Treatment

Each of these phases is a part of the whole and typically, each is required to achieve real success.

**Acute vs. long term:** When a patient comes to the office and all information is gathered, there may be many items to pursue. A good plan may have to be done in “phases.”

- 1) Acute phase:** The acute phase is meant to rapidly address any symptoms that are disturbing daily life; some examples are: exhausting fatigue, pain of any kind, debilitating depression, or anxiety, and so on. This phase will be intensive, aggressive, and is meant to get the job done. Detoxification would be an example of such a treatment.
- 2) Deeper phase:** This phase addresses the deeper root causes and any other issues that may be contributing to or re-creating symptoms. It further addresses other issues that may have been noted in the investigational work-up that could cause problems in the future. Immune status enhancement would be an example.
- 3) Maintenance/chronic phase:** This entails putting pieces in place long-term, perhaps winding down the earlier treatments slowly to find a stable program that provides support for all vulnerable or compromised systems and protection for longer term health and well-being.

A program that attends only to the acute phase is likely going to fail to meet your **real** goal of great health using as little medication as possible **and** a long, healthy life. After all, isn't that why you are interested in the holistic approach?

## 5 Misconceptions that Could Cause You to Miss Your Health Mark

**Misconception #1:** *Wait to find your physician match.* If you have symptoms, these are clues that your body needs help. Do your due diligence, find a practitioner who makes sense to you, and then move forward ASAP. Real help awaits, but only if you act.

**Misconception #2:** *Symptom relief is the only goal.* As I wrote earlier, symptom relief is the goal in the “acute phase” of treatment. But that is also the goal of traditional medicine. What distinguishes holistic medicine is the process of discovering underlying imbalances that **cause** the symptoms (the so-called “root causes”) and then connecting them. Don’t settle for less or stop short in treatment after the acute phase. Results long-term may well be disappointing.

**Misconception #3:** *A functional practitioner is a functional practitioner.* Refer back to the “red flags” page. Not all are alike. Select with care, using the logical criteria laid out prior. And remember, **experience** is the greatest teacher, there is no substitute for it. So, seek a physician whose methods are current, but who also has invaluable years of experience both in lab interpretation and listening to patients. **Experienced hearing** of the subtle, important points you raise in your history and how to deal with them can be the difference between success and failure.

**Misconception #4:** *Cheaper is better.* We looked at this on page one, but it is probably the single misconception that leads patients to select a less than optimal situation and to decide that the holistic path is not effective. You need time and you need relevant available tests to explore your care. How many patients have left my own practice to find an integrative doctor in-network, only to return disappointed. Sub-optimal treatment is a waste of time and money and may prolong your recovery if you are ill, allow illness to progress, or even miss the optimal window of opportunity to achieve the best results.

**Misconception #5:** *Your practitioner can outline the course, duration, and cost of your treatment on day one.* That might be great, but it is unclear when you embark on an investigation together what may be discovered. It is also impossible to know

quite how well someone will respond to a treatment, whether they will have to proceed more slowly due to sensitivity or associated issues. If anyone tells you upfront what treatment will cost to completion, they are either selling you a pre-packaged plan not customized to you or they are making promises a legitimate physician cannot keep.

# What Distinguishes a Medical Doctor (M.D.) From Other Holistic Practitioners?

Everyone who is called a physician is NOT a licensed medical doctor. Clearly, the training involved in each specialty (medical doctor, chiropractor, naturopath, nutritionist, etc.) differs greatly. And each specialty brings unique skills to the table. What makes a medical doctor special in the integrative health chain?

- 1.) They are in a position to work one-on-one with other medical doctors in relevant specialties as peers, having the same educational background.
- 2.) They are able to continue you on your medications, and hence, may serve as your primary care doctors, if you wish, and coordinate with any of your specialists.
- 3.) They can order your routine tests such as EKG's, echocardiograms, bone mineral density, colonoscopy, etc. And in the event of acute illness, they can order necessary diagnostics or communicate with hospital physicians.
- 4.) They can use injectables in treatment such as vitamin injections, intravenous treatments of all sorts, or customized injections and other unique and custom-tailored medications from compounding pharmacies, created just to your needs.
- 5.) They are in the ideal vantage point to work with practitioners in all other integrative fields who may offer valuable modalities to add as part of the whole and coordinate your whole multifaceted health team to work for the common good – to achieve your best health!

Unlike some traditional medical doctors, a good holistic MD very much welcomes the input of other holistic practitioners as well as other traditional doctors. He or she coordinates and synthesizes the best of all relevant fields into a multi-disciplinary tapestry for the patient.

## *You Don't Want to Make These 4 Mistakes!*

- 1.) **Relying on a program that does not include traditional AND functional lab testing.** You need both. Failure to do so may leave very serious issues undetected while treating more long-term issues only and has the potential to be dangerous.
- 2.) **Basing your selection on low price.** You want a practitioner who has seen the value of their work, knows it, and gives you their all. When was the last time you heard someone bragging, “Boy, am I going to a cheap doctor!” No, you want to be able to say, “I am going to a wonderful doctor and he/she is worth every penny. They have changed my life!”
- 3.) **One call does not tell it all.** Yes, an informative website provides good introductory information and yes, a free consult (if available) is a useful connection and a sign of good faith on the doctor’s part, for sure. But in the long run, you cannot ultimately know if you have found “the one” until you spend some time talking with the doctor, hearing what he/she suggests, or says, seeing how he/she listens, and just seeing if you feel you can work as a team. Hopefully, the website and pre-screening will have lead you in the perfect direction, but this first visit is always an exploration. It is well worth the time, effort, and money to explore adequately and find “your” best doctor.
- 4.) **Listen to what others have said.** Pay attention to the experience of other patients. Testimonials are shared when a practitioner has made a difference in a patient’s life. In them, you can read not only what happened, but learn what kind of relationship the doctor maintains with their patients. Read between the lines. Patients will not always be happy with any out-of-pocket payments (we have discussed this). But the bottom line is:
  - What was actual treatment like?
  - Was valuable knowledge shared?
  - Was a strong therapeutic connection made by the doctor with patients who took their programs seriously and responsibly? (Hopefully, you will be one of those patients!)

## *Cost vs. Value: The Bottom Line*

As Dr. Sachin Patel writes, “Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.” Use the selection guide to find a wonderful, experienced, integrative/holistic medical doctor. Once you have selected, follow your program carefully. Working with your physician closely, using the information you gather, you will achieve results that are far superior to any you might have imagined. Results that will contribute to a life of health and happiness, for you and those you live with. Issues will not only be corrected from within at the deepest level, but you will have the tools to maintain your health, and a new vision of health and illness to which you can return should new issues arise for you and your family. You will, yourself, become an example of inspiration and a source of knowledge to those around you. The benefit to cost ratio is infinite here.

Dr. Patel, a functional practitioner in Canada himself, also wisely writes, “Health is not for sale; if it were, no one would be able to afford it.” It is written in many HR sources that, in fact, your health is your greatest “asset.” Although no monetary value can actually be placed on health, it is indeed invaluable. Excellent health is literally worth money, at the workplace, and it is often not fully appreciated until it is damaged or compromised. What project can be worth more of an investment of time and even necessary money to achieve success? In the long haul, it is to your great advantage to look proactively at every positive discovery/invention that you can to set and maintain yourself on an optimal course far into the future.

If, after all you have read, you are still heavily focused on finding “the cheapest practitioner,” I can only invite you to re-think. Your health, in the sense we are using in here, is your life. How much is your life worth?

A somewhat greater investment now in an excellent program from an experienced practitioner will deliver in its value many-fold what you invest. Discuss your concerns about price if you like with your practitioner and see what they can do, but in a nutshell, this is not the place to cut corners.

*Taking Prompt*  
*and Effective Action*  
*is 100% Fail Proof!*

If you bring a pro-active mindset to your healthcare, and you are working with a talented and reputable holistic physician, the process cannot fail to be a positive one. Give it a fair chance. Have some faith. If you work with your doctor and results are not complete, a good doctor will refer you further and provide another associate with the necessary information to work with them, or to take your care over and move you to the next level. One of my friends said in a moment of brilliance, “You can’t steer a ship in a dry dock.” Get yourself out of dry dock! If you have selected well, you have embarked on a process that will ultimately succeed.



## *Optimal Wellness: It Starts With Your Vision*

Now you know the things to watch for in making a selection. But before you walk through the door, to get the most out of your experience, be clear as to your own focus and what you want.

- 1.) **The commitment:** Your doctor, if you select well, has the knowledge and tools to assist and guide you. But, remember “The doctor of the future is the patient.” Are you ready to take charge of your health and do whatever it takes to make it work? Are you, as they say, “Tired of being sick and tired?” You deserve good health. Are you ready to take the first step today? Are you ready to change?
- 2.) **What are your goals:** Are you looking for symptom relief only (acute phase) or do you want to achieve the deep level of vibrant health you are born to have, that you deserve? Let the doctor you choose know exactly what you want. Get clear on that. And then work your magic as a team. Get ready to invest yourself, heart, mind, body, and soul, in what you really want. Don’t settle for less. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to hit that high note!
- 3.) **Know before you go:** Make sure to question your doctor’s office staff to ensure that he/she offers what you want. Many questions may be answered on the website, but during the free consult (if there is one) or discussion with the staff, and especially during your initial office consultation, ask whatever you need to know to give you a sense of trust that this is your best choice.
- 4.) **Your investment in your best health:** Go ready to share, to learn, and to work. Engage in the process. And know that it will not take a day and will not be free. If you are in the right place, if you have done your homework, the time and money spent with the physician will be some of the most valuable time you will spend in your life.

Remember, quick and cheap are not words associated with extraordinary health. You know what you want. Make sure you take the steps to get it.

If you have questions about anything in this guide or about how to select the right practitioner for you, we are available to speak with you during office hours at our office, A Better Alternative Medical Center. Call us at 201-525-1155 or send an e-mail inquiry to [a.better.alternative.medical@gmail.com](mailto:a.better.alternative.medical@gmail.com). If you are interested, you are welcome to schedule a 10-minute complimentary phone consultation with Robin Leder, M.D., or to set up your initial health discovery session. If you would like to reach us through our website contact page, you can simply [click here](#).

## *About the Author: Robin Ellen Leder, M.D.*

Dr. Robin Leder established her practice, A Better Alternative Medical Center, in Hackensack, New Jersey, in 1991. Since then, she has created integrative/holistic medical programs for literally thousands of patients and guided them to an experience of optimal health.

Dr. Leder was valedictorian of her high school, class of 525 students, graduated from Brown University with a major in psychology *cum laude*, and received her medical degree from Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Having read about nutritional medicine and orthomolecular psychiatry, in her youth, she was introduced to complementary medicine long before it became “fashionable,” working at the side of her mentor, Robert Atkins (The Atkins Diet). She also obtained a certificate in psychoanalytic study and has taken dozens of continuing education credit in medicine, psychiatry, autism treatment, and addiction medicine.

Though her years of experience and credentials speak for themselves, Dr. Leder says “I am most proud of the relationships I have enjoyed with my patients over the years and I am most grateful for the teaching that being with them has provided to me, and the joy that I have received watching their lives evolve and transform through our work together. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see a patient’s efforts lead to wonderful results. That is a gift that keeps me going and doing what I do. I couldn’t be doing more gratifying work.”

Outside of work, Dr. Leder has been a pop, rock, and jazz singer for all of her adult life. She is an animal lover and the proud cat-mom of Moses, a particularly handsome tabby.