

Women's Voices  
Dr. Laura Polak, D.C.

### How to find an Alternative Health Care Provider

Sonoma County is graced by a plethora of alternative healing professionals so how do you decide where to receive care?

First, debunk the myth that you are the “patient”. You are the most knowledgeable person about your body. As a consumer in a “doctor’s” office your role is that of an active participant. Most alternative practitioners would like their “patients” to take an active role in their healing process. What does that mean? Goals, both personal and professional should be established at the beginning of your relationship with the provider and reviewed as you move through care. Make a list of the things you hope to achieve under care and then ask the provider what her/his goals for your care are.

Next, ask the practitioner how long the process will take? Healing is generally not an overnight process. In our culture where fast food is served in five minutes and aspirin can numb pain instantaneously we often look for short-term solutions. Most “problems” are messages from the body that something is not working and we need to pay attention. Many times this message is inconvenient and we try to suppress or get rid of it instead of getting to the root of the problem. Ask if this treatment will address the cause or just the symptoms? If so, how long will the process generally take? A good rule of thumb is to look at how long the problem has been bothering you. Acute and infrequent situations such as headaches, indigestion, or diarrhea may have a shorter course to run than migraines, ulcers or irritable bowel.

Thirdly, look at your core beliefs. Many of us were taught that physical symptoms are the result of physical dysfunction. The myth goes something like this; every physical symptom can be traced back to a physical cause. “I have a “bad back” therefore I must have lifted something improperly, slept wrong, exercised improperly and so on. If we cannot trace it to something we have physically done with our bodies than we often assume it must be the result of some physical dysfunction inside our bodies. I must have a slipped disc, a pinched nerve... Of course some of the time this actually is the cause for the current symptom however, more often that not symptoms result as a combination of physical, chemical and emotional stresses and not just the one physical.

The Emotional Factor. Think back to one recent physical symptom you have had. What was happening in your emotional life before this event occurred? What were you thinking at the time of the injury? Can work stress, relationship stress and overall stress affect your physical relationship to your body? Most definitely! Current research suggests that the molecular structure of cell membranes alters in relation to our emotions. The research suggests that the surface receptors of cells in nerve cells and white blood cells, actually respond to peptides released with certain emotions. Noted author and biochemist Candace Pert states, “We can no longer think of emotions as having less validity than physical material substance, but instead must see them as cellular signals that are involved in the process of translating information into physical reality, literally transforming mind into matter.” Thus, the physical and emotional are literally linked

through a series of chemical alterations that occur in your body when your emotions change.

The Chemical Factor. You have heard the old saying you are what you eat? What we take into our bodies also affects our relationship to physical symptoms. Chemical stresses include nutrition, living around harsh chemicals, dust, fumes, alcohol, smoking, medication and yes even nutritional supplements and herbs. When you swing through the drive-thru at the local fast food joint, you probably have experienced that rock in the stomach feeling at some point. A significant portion of your energy is being utilized to dismantle the large chains of molecules into usable portions and discard the rest as waste. Whole foods are foods that are found closest to their natural form and are easier to recognize by the body and digest. If our body is using a lot of energy processing foods or other chemicals it can decrease the energy available to us for healing and day today life.

The new view of the body is not a mechanistic one. Physical symptoms are a combination of emotional, physical, chemical and spiritual shifts in the body. The kinds of life choices we make are a part of our overall health assessment. So before isolating out the physical component make sure to check in with all the parts of yourself to assess what it is you think your body is trying to tell you. Once you have assessed these areas of your own life you can determine how and who will best suit your healing needs.

### **Questions and Goals for finding a Provider**

1. Make a list of goals you hope to achieve with this provider.
2. Negotiate a health care contract with your provider.
3. Be responsible for agreeing to monitoring and evaluating the treatment you receive.
4. Interview the provider: How long have they been in practice? What is their credentials? What is their Fee structure? Do they accept insurance?
5. Support your healing physically, emotionally, chemically and spiritually.

Healing is a journey that is best done as a team. Ultimately health and wellness occurs when we take charge of our own healing and find health care providers who can assist and support us along the way.

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