

## **Mini-Review – CAM Concepts**

### **Find and Address the Cause of Illness**

#### **Theory**

Naturopathic medicine is based on several principles, one of which is to identify and treat the underlying cause(s) of disease. This principle characterizes the belief that the manifestation of disease is a complex interaction of many factors, including genetic susceptibility, behavioral factors, nutritional factors, external environmental factors, mental/emotional/spiritual factors, physiological factors, and previous damage or abnormality. For example, in this model, a simple cold is not caused solely by a virus. Several factors may result in the manifestation of the URI; dry, heated indoor air that irritates respiratory membranes, nutritional deficiencies that leave these membranes more vulnerable to viral attachment, poor nutrition habits such as excessive refined sugar that can suppress important immune system functions, and finally, exposure of the susceptible respiratory system to the virus. It is simple to address the signs and symptoms of a cold, but unless the underlying issues are also addressed, it is likely that the illness will recur frequently.

The critical step in finding and addressing the cause(s) of illness in this model is to identify and remove “obstacles to cure.” Obstacles to cure are any physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or environmental factors that can lead to illness by blocking the body’s ability to heal itself. These obstacles are identified during the comprehensive health interview, and recommendations for removing them will be made in the treatment plan for each individual. An example will illustrate this approach. A patient with PMS is interviewed, and during the course of the interview it is discovered that; she is overweight, constipated, hates her job which she describes as very stressful, and feels unable to express anger. These issues would all be considered obstacles to cure and possible causative factors in this patient’s PMS. A naturopathic treatment plan would address ways to remove these obstacles, along with targeted therapies to treat the symptoms of PMS. A sample treatment plan might look like this: Vitamin B-6 and magnesium to address the symptoms (believed related to estrogen excess and serotonin dysfunction), fiber, water, and exercise for the constipation, a weight loss plan focused on increasing exercise, decreasing calories, and modifying protein/fat/carbohydrate ratios, and counseling for job stress and emotional suppression.

Certain organs or organ systems are commonly believed to be important areas to evaluate and address as underlying factors in disease states. These include the immune system, the organs of elimination (skin, lungs, liver, kidney, and GI system), the neurological system, and endocrine system. External factors commonly thought to be factors in the causation of disease are microorganisms, toxic exposures from air, water, or food, and dysfunctional relationships to people, community, and self. All of these areas will be evaluated during the interview process, and if obstacles are identified, they will be addressed in the therapeutic plan.

