

Going green in chiropractic

By Gerry Clum, DC

The worldwide recognition of Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and the film's subsequent Oscars set the stage for a shift in global attitudes toward the "green movement."

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize for these and related efforts raised the issue of the green movement into global consciousness and fanned a fire that has been smoldering for decades in people all over the world.

In the days, weeks, and months since the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, countless articles and innumerable products have come to center stage in an attempt to better understand, address, or capitalize on one aspect or another of what it means to "go green."

Going green is as fashionable as anything ever has been. This fashion statement comes with a difference — it has teeth, sharp penetrating teeth — in the form of economic support, cultural push, enlightened self interest, and a desire to do something better than we have done before with respect to the environment.

The mantra of the ecology movement for the past quarter century of "think globally and act locally" has come to every home in America.

DO OUR PART

We are all looking at ways to do our part — what kind of car to drive, how to drive it, when to run our washers and dryers, and if we are ready to make the jump to compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFL).

While we are beginning to pay closer attention to our behaviors and decisions from a green vantage point in terms of transportation and energy consumption, as a society, we haven't quite translated the message of going green into our healthcare thinking and options. In this

inevitability lies a great opportunity for the chiropractic profession; the opportunity to not simply make a contribution, but to take on a leadership role.

In terms of going green as it relates to healthcare, who has a stronger track record, is more conceptually aligned in general, and better suited than the chiropractor to step forward and bring this potential to the public?

Chiropractors have historically been cautious about all forms of healthcare intervention.

Our caution has been directed at issues ranging from the use of fluoride in drinking water to pharmaceuticals to surgical procedures. As a discipline, we never bought into DuPont's concept of better living through chemistry. If we did follow a Madison Avenue ad campaign, it was more likely to be "it's not nice to fool [with] Mother Nature!

As a discipline, we have always seen, respected, and supported concepts of natural healing. This is not an

awareness we need to come to or one we

recently arrived at, it is the premise upon which our entire existence is based. The chiropractor has always seen the human being as a self-renewing, self-regenerating font of healing capacity. We have always taught our patients to be in harmony with the elements of healing.

Our colleagues in medicine have taken another path. Theirs is steeped in chemical intervention, so much so that the prescription pad itself is synonymous with the practice of medicine. They did so in the age when baby formula was determined to be better than mother's milk, and Tang became the breakfast drink of choice over fresh orange juice. Stronger drugs, like more powerful engines, were a sign of progress. More power was good and its application was without thought of side- or after- effects.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Today, the "law of unintended consequences" is considered at the start of every effort and intervention. The venue doesn't matter. We have come to the realization that the use of power has consequences, and



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often, those consequences are far more destructive than the original intent was designed to change.

We have seen the emergence of such concepts as living a carbon-neutral lifestyle, and decreasing the environmental impact of our homes on the planet. The translation of these concepts into healthcare is well underway. In many circles it remains under the radar, but it is not out of sight.

As an example, a current line of reasoning with respect to allergies and asthma is the hygiene hypotheses.

Simply stated, the hypothesis suggests we have unnaturally "over-cleaned" our world and have not given our children exposures that would help them develop normal, tempered, immune response.

Rather, we have bathed them in antiseptics, we have caused them not to experience normal childhood diseases and we have left them immunologically unprepared. At the same time, we strengthened the microbial world and have empowered the conversion of plain old Staph

aureus to Methicillin-resistant Staph aureus (MRSA).

We burned coal to warm our homes and sped up the accumulation of greenhouse gases. We had a warm house, and we now reap the effects of the law of unintended consequences. We had simple infections and we blasted them for generations with the magic bullet of antibiotics.

For many years, we had fewer, simpler infections thanks to the effort, but soon we began to learn about antibiotic resistant organisms and super bugs. We failed to appreciate that these outcomes were not a part of a normal evolutionary cycle, but rather the consequences of our unfettered use of power.

Our automobiles, machines, and circumstances made us comfortable, our calorie intake increased and our calorie output decreased as we welcomed the age of obesity.

Our children didn't drink milk and play in the sunshine as generations before them. Their baby bottles and sippy cups were filled with sweet carbonated drinks and, a half century later, their bones are breaking with far greater regularity.

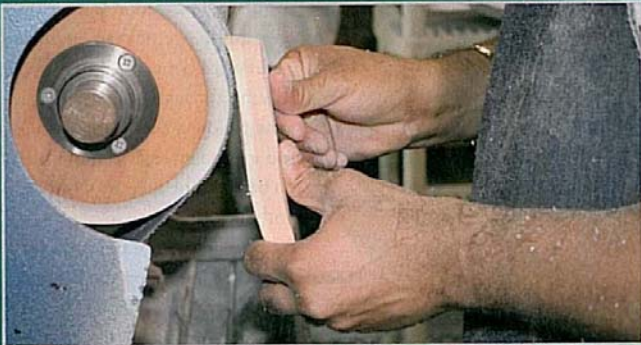
The parallels are endless. The mechanisms are the same — a good idea — a time-saving, money-saving, progressive idea replaces a time-honored reality and we reap all forms of harmful secondary effect.

RETHINKING OUR WAYS

No one wants a world without advances and conveniences, whether we are speaking about the home (house) we live in, or the home (body) we live in. All around us, people are rethinking totally accepted and highly integrated lifestyle matters. We need to help them translate this rethinking into their health and wellness decisions.


In days gone by, houses didn't need

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to be designed to be energy efficient or minimally environmentally impactful — remember “conspicuous consumption.” Today they do.

In days gone by, we didn't need to think about strengthening ourselves as healing entities — a script for this and a script for that and away we went.

The “layers” of green thinking that will need to be applied to healthcare in the days ahead are almost mind-numbing. If we begin with the effect of more judicious personal health decisions, we can then move on to the impact of health-related products on the environment.

The pollution of ground water with pharmaceutical products has been a matter for the 11 o'clock news for months. The volume of materials generated as waste through healthcare practices is predicted to clog landfills across the country.

The carbon footprint of the

production, storage, and distribution networks associated with healthcare-related products is one of the most intensive of the industrialized world with extraordinary solvent use and waste generated per final product unit.

Finally, the end use packaging systems are notorious for the production of waste materials associated with the delivery of each and every dose of medication.

MOVING FORWARD

One does not need to be very creative to begin to appreciate the compounding effect of strategies that move people away from a product-oriented medical model of healthcare to a personal-behavior supported model augmented by systems and approaches that rely on the inherent healing power of the individual.

Advancing the concept of western-style medicine as an environmentally

taxing, if not hostile, activity is as easy as demonstrating the environmentally harmful practices of petroleum-based lifestyles.

Advancing the use of nonproduct-oriented healthcare, such as chiropractic, is similarly as easy as demonstrating the effectiveness of wind or solar energy approaches.

Today, more than ever, we must see our bodies as renewable, health-generating systems. We need to support the system and generate even more good health. We can generate enough health-sustaining capacity to reduce the ecological load on the grid of healthcare. ☺



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