

Health coaches and Western medicine: A new approach

■ BY ANGELA SIDLO, CERTIFIED HEALTH COACH

Most people today see their doctor and are given directives, such as reduce your stress, lower your blood pressure or lose 20 pounds. At this point the patient isn't sure where to begin first. They search the Internet for answers, finding over 100 different diet and exercise plans guaranteed to work, if you sign up. It's exhausting, leaving the patient to confused to do anything.

There is a new wave of change among doctors these days, I recently learned of from a clinic in New York. Dr. Frank Lipman founded Eleven Wellness Center. His team of practitioners includes six health coaches. They work together to offer patient-centered care to help people get healthy and stay healthy. The treatment strategies take an integrative approach by combining Western medicine with what are considered alternative therapies. They try to avoid pharmaceuticals, if possible, and use acupuncture, physical therapy, chiropractic and nutrition counseling. Encouraging patients to become proactive in their own health and partner with them as they journey toward true health and optimal wellness.

Some doctors are strengthening practices around the nation by using health coaches. When a patient gets healthy, truly healthy, they want to share their story with friends and relatives, and the doctor is the recipient of all those referrals.

So what is a health coach?

A health coach supports individuals and groups of people making lifestyle and nutritional changes to improve their health, much like a personal trainer would.

Health coach training programs and certification ensure that health coaches know how to work with diverse groups of people and equip the coaches with the tools necessary to work with doctors and best fit the needs of their patients. Health coaching is a new paradigm in partnering with Western medicine for assisting people to become masters of their wellness.

Why do people work with health coaches?

For numerous reasons, but generally people work with a health coach in partnership with their doctor because they are ready to make some type of change in their life. A health coach can help them untangle the directives that their Doctor has given them, and create a step-by-step plan to get them back on track to wellness. If the patient envisions a life where stress is more easily managed, where they are in control of their weight,



and fitness becomes a regular activity, then they should consider working with a health coach to see how their life will improve.

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How does health coaching work?

In the partnership with Western medicine, a health coach sits in on the health history consultation with the doctor. Following that consultation, a series of meetings will be arranged with the coach. During these meetings, individuals will generally begin to formulate a wellness vision, goals that reflect the directives received from the doctor for the next three to six months, and the patient's first week's goals. This is not a cookie-cutter approach, but a customized plan based on

their individual needs and desires. They will then meet weekly with the coach to review progress, assist in working through any obstacles they may have faced or discuss things the patient may want to learn more about; then an action plan is set for the upcoming week. The health coach reports back to the doctor on the progress.

What do I discuss with a health coach?

Some have tried to get healthy on their own and gotten very confused about what the right diet is, what kind of exercise to do or what supplements to take. It can be very intimidating. A health coach helps develop a personalized plan that successfully takes people through the maze of questions and helps keep them accountable to the goals. In weekly visits, the patient and the team celebrate successes and work through obstacles surrounding health challenges. The objective is to design an individualized, with measurable goals that works for a sustainably healthy lifestyle.

There are several health coaches here in Clatsop County who are eager to work with you and your primary care physician to navigate the waters toward true wellness. Ask your doctor how you can get started.