

The Bridge to Health by Maureen Tighe, ND, LAc.

“Ideal teachers use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross; then having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create bridges of their own.” -Nikos

As a naturopathic physician, I am constantly referring to this favorite quote in my clinical practice. Why would I appreciate it so much as a physician when it clearly is talking about teachers? The word ‘doctor’ comes from the greek word ‘docere’ which means ‘to teach’. One of the six principles of Naturopathic medicine is ‘doctor as teacher’. The role of a Naturopathic physician involves educating people about their health. In this way there is an opportunity to empower patients through knowledge to take a pro-active role in their health and well-being.

A shift is occurring in the way people view health and disease. Although many of us have gotten used to the idea of taking a pill for any odd symptom we get, this approach leaves many developing more illness. Headaches really aren't due to an aspirin deficiency. Likewise, feeling nervous is not due to an inability of the brain to synthesize Valium. When symptoms such as headaches are occurring the body is letting us know that something is wrong within our body. Germs and microorganisms don't cause disease all by their microscopic selves. Rather, they take advantage of us when our bodies are weakened by stress, nutrient-poor food and toxic accumulations. Vibrant, healthy people rarely “catch” germs at all. These symptoms that we experience, whether it is headache, allergies or insomnia, are messages that the body is giving us to which we must listen. It is all too familiar to view symptoms as inconveniences that should be eliminated. Symptoms tell us how the body is trying to heal and serve as clues when our systems are overloaded. Frequently these symptoms are ignored which may result in a progressively increasing susceptibility to serious disease. Naturopathic physicians help their patients listen to and understand the messages given by the body. Our bodies have a tremendous ability to heal, if given the chance. Centuries ago, Hippocrates referred to this ability as the “vital force”. This inherent drive is known by natural medicine practitioners as “the healing power of nature” or the *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*. It has been estimated that 70-90% of diseases are self-limiting. In other words, the body will heal itself without intervention. When people learn to listen to the messages from their body, and understand what they mean, they can be actively involved in promoting long-term health.

This approach to health involves people being engaged in a health plan provided by their Naturopathic physician. It puts more responsibility on the patient to tune in to their bodies, make healthful choices and prevent disease from occurring. The relationship between the patient and physician is symbolic of the bridge. Naturopathic physicians act as facilitators or guides for their patients and constantly encourage maintenance in order to achieve excellent health. If we want to be healthy, it is up to us! In other words, we must become our own best physician...as the bridge joyfully collapses.

Pizzorno, HJ.: *Total Wellness: Improve your health by understanding the body's healing systems.* Prima Publishing, 1996.