



# Too Many Cooks

By Wendy Marks  
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When someone comes into my office looking for help with a medical issue, often they have been suffering with their condition for a period of months or even years, and are frustrated that they have not been able to get better. Usually they have been to a bunch of Western medicine practitioners, and often a lot of alternative practitioners as well. I always say that I am the caboose, the end of the train of practitioners, often seen as a last resort. (But, no pressure. . .) This article is intended to emphasize the importance of open communication between the patient and all of his or her health care providers.

The first step before I work with someone is to have an intake done, a brief set of questions that gives me an idea of the person's history, including what medications they may be taking. If I have to research a medication or a condition, I have time to do that before I see the person. This makes me better able to understand what steps have already been taken and what diagnoses have been ruled out. It also allows me to take a look at possible side effects of medications prescribed by several different practitioners.

## Drug and Supplement Companies

Matters can become complicated when taking a complementary approach to health care. Many of you know that I offer supplements through practitioner-based sales. I find that the companies that provide these products are concerned about educating practitioners regarding the appropriate use of these supplements. I don't want to be too preachy or indicate that people are not able to make good decisions themselves, but we are constantly being bombarded with advertisements from both Western pharmaceutical and health supplement companies. I am amazed at the sophisticated



advertisements that I see on TV for drugs (and the myriad side effects they may cause). Some supplement companies are not innocent either in this regard. Their method is usually slightly different, with direct mail, catalogs, and infomercials describing "cures" for many different conditions. Neither pharma nor supplement companies indicate that their products may interact with prescribed medications, or mitigate the effects of those medications. Neither companies seem to have any desire to educate the public about appropriate and proper use of their products.

We have the situation now where very large corporations and supplement manufacturers are increasingly the same companies. Procter & Gamble, for example, has recently bought several lines of supplements that are quite high-end, and ones that those of us in alternative healthcare have used and respected for many years. I don't know what's going to happen to medications and supplements when a large, strongly profit-motivated company takes over with an agenda of maximizing returns. I'm not saying that all supplement companies are noble, or that they do not have a profit agenda, but I have seen a lot of negative changes when a large company buys a supplement company. One example of this is a product that I use regularly to reduce inflammation. After its purchase by a large corporation, many of the most expensive ingredients have been eliminated, and so has the effectiveness. And the price has doubled.

The idea that supplements are "harmless" and not drugs frightens me. Anything you put in your mouth is a drug; it will effect your functioning and nutrition. I often see folks taking 20 or 30 different supplements. As a general rule five or so should be the limit.

#### Practitioners' Dialog

I tell people that I am a team player. You don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are many things about Western medicine that are terrific. There are many discoveries that have been life-saving. I would never ask someone to go off their medication and change it to something else just because it was an allopathic drug. I also know that Western doctors spend many years training and learning and are an essential part of a care model.

The addition of alternative practitioners to a care plan can also bring lots to the table. If we use a measure of effectiveness and studies done by universities and hospitals, Reiki, acupuncture, and many other techniques show excellent results in helping people recover and heal. And often we can do it with minimal or less expensive techniques.

Here's where I get frustrated: I think my record for the number of practitioners seen by one person for an illness was 105. Yup. . . Can you imagine the cost and stress that created? This person had thousands of tests (often repeated at different labs) and invasive procedures done, including six surgeries. What is "exploratory" surgery anyway?

We need to communicate in both Western and alternative universes. Proper use of medications and supplements needs to be discussed effectively, and both orientations need to admit where their knowledge and efficacy fall short. Patients need and deserve the time, effort and putting aside of ego that is required to help them heal. Yes, each of us is responsible for advocating for our own care, but we can't know intricate medical issues without understanding who and what should be involved.

So I have made a policy. If a person's practitioners, Western or alternative, won't talk to me about their care (with permission of course), I will not refer to them. That may not seem like a lot, but it's a start. And I ask you as users of care to stand up and ask for yourself that you receive a team—because we all know a team is a good thing. Complementary medicine works both ways.

Namaste,  
Wendy