

What's Turning America's Doctors Green? The Case for Ecologically Sustainable Medicine

A nonprofit organization striving to 'green' America's healthcare system addresses the over-reliance on pharmaceutical drugs and the resulting problem of toxic medical waste. The Teleosis Institute's founder, Dr. Joel Kreisberg, teaches about the environmental effects of medicine and promotes Ecologically Sustainable Medicine, which creates little to no waste and has a better impact upon the environment.

(PRWeb) Sept. 13, 2005 -- From community-based Earth Day events to magazines on sustainability and 'green' conferences, the environmental movement has inspired some to work tirelessly toward saving the planet, and motivated others to at least toss the right container in the correct recycling bin for garbage pick up every week. However, in spite of our collective efforts, both large and small, there is still one area of environmental awareness in which, even after twenty years of educating ourselves, we are sorely missing the mark.

According to Dr. Joel Kreisberg DC, an adjunct faculty member at JFK University, members of the 'green community,' and the community-at-large, have entirely neglected the area of 'green medicine.'

"The medical industry is the second largest part of the Gross National Product for the entire American culture, yet there has been little accomplished in regards to the many environmental issues surrounding medicine itself," says Kreisberg.

Kreisberg believes that, "If we're going to create a sustainable culture, we'll need healthcare to join in to the general 'greening' of our world." Within the medical community, he explains that, in particular, there is a serious problem concerning toxic waste. Citing our reliance on pharmaceutical drugs as the major culprit, due to the amount of waste they generate, the avid environmentalist poses the question, "Where do drugs come from and where do they go?"

"When dealing with the waste stream, you have to realize that hormones and antibiotics are washed back into our oceans, our animals, and our food products," Kreisberg explains. "Pharmaceuticals present a very high cost to us; they end up back in our environment, or in our bodies. Did you know that the average baby being born in the United States right now is being born with over 200 chemicals in their system?"

Although the World Health Organization has recognized the problem of overuse, and the consequential lack of effectiveness of antibiotics, little action has been taken to curtail the problem. In order to combat this situation, Kreisberg advocates the implementation of sustainable medical practices as a first line of defense before antibiotics are indiscriminately prescribed.

In the process of determining those sustainable practices that could contribute to that first line of defense, the Berkeley-based chiropractor and health educator, has identified numerous health-related practices that generate little-to-no negative waste. These include many cost-effective, preventative forms of treatment, such as exercise, right diet, mind-body meditation practices, and other forms of stress reduction, among many others.

"Ecologically Sustainable Medicine is medicine that is good for people and good for the planet. It doesn't generate any waste," says Kreisberg, who coined the term, 'Ecologically Sustainable Medicine' or 'ESM' to

describe the kinds of practices that consider the health of the planet along with the needs of the people.

Realizing that the environmental effects of medicine are not taught in medical schools, Kreisberg took it upon himself to develop environmentally-based programs to educate the entire healthcare system about these issues. He created the Teleosis Institute, named after the Greek term meaning ‘greater self-realization.’ The institute is a not-for-profit organization, in which an ongoing discussion occurs, and where resources for ‘greening’ America's healthcare system are shared among those who practice different forms of medicine.

What began as a small backyard enterprise, has turned into a staff of eight employees, 22 regional coordinators, and a cadre of members throughout the United States – from physicians and nurses, to acupuncturists, chiropractors, bodyworkers, osteopaths, and naturopaths, among others. Famed author and physician, Dr. Larry Dossey, who has researched the correlation between prayer and health, Connie Grauds, founder of the Association of Natural Medicine Pharmacists, and Dr. Ben Kligler, medical director of Continuum Center for Health and Healing, Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City, sit on the Advisory Board of the Teleosis Institute.

Kreisberg, who teaches college classes in Ecologically Sustainable Medicine, is pleased that both mainstream physicians across the country, as well as alternative practitioners, are participating. While mainstream physicians and alternative practitioners have oftentimes experienced adversarial relationships, the conversation about green medicine allows the two sides to come together under the same banner.

As a way to educate more people, Kreisberg created a quarterly journal called, ‘Symbiosis: A Journal of Ecological Sustainable Medicine,’ and founded a national ESM Network, that provides a way for medical practitioners to support one another in continuing the conversation about green medicine. He also operates a number of small clinics that provide cost-effective services for people who have no healthcare.

For practitioners who want to embrace the green medicine concept, Kreisberg has designed a three-phase program: 1) practitioners can take responsibility for ‘greening’ their physical environment; 2) they can choose to become environmental advocates, and 3) they can commit to practicing Ecologically Sustainable Medicine.

"The physical environment is a very large determinant of our health," he says. "As we struggle with the issues of the environment, we will increasingly see the opportunity to make wiser choices. When we value the planet's overall health, we actually can choose medical practices and procedures that create less waste and have a better impact upon the environment as well."

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