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Hormones

A Picture of Life

A recent report (December 2005) from the Royal College of Physicians has found that the UK public tend to see the medical profession as negative, defensive and self-serving and goes on to suggest that doctors should start to see themselves as partners in care with patients and other health professionals instead of the authoritarian figures they have become, laying down the law.

This is I feel an important admission not only for patients but also for the future of complementary medicine.

From my professional point of view I believe this is hugely important in the field of hormonal health where, unfortunately, doctors have been doling out synthetic hormones like sweets for any woman whose symptoms may be described as 'hormonal'. We have to remember though that women eagerly pursued them, after all they were seen as a 'liberator' and 'equality provider' in the sexual revolution, especially as doctors were pleased to provide them. But now we are all older and wiser and many studies have cautioned us against the use or overuse of synthetic hormone supplementation. The results: many women are confused but still suffer from the deleterious effects of hormonal imbalance; and, doctors know only one course of action!

You see, the contraceptive pill is not just used for preventing pregnancy, it can also be prescribed for: polycystic ovaries, acne, endometriosis, severe menstrual cramping,

irregular or absent periods, hirsutism and PMS, for example, and all of these problems are the result of hormonal imbalance and the Pill is prescribed based on a belief or understanding that it will address an insufficiency! This is an important point because most drugs act as agents to suppress symptoms - they don't tend to deal with a cause - but hormone supplementation is a completely different approach and we don't realise the depths we plumb in the human condition when we introduce foreign hormones!

Hormones are our bodies' chemical messengers. They travel through the bloodstream to trigger certain activities or changes in the body. They are stimulated from one main source, the hypothalamus, which is situated in, and connects directly with, the area of the brain that controls the emotions; the limbic area. The hypothalamus also sends out messages to the pituitary gland which is in charge of all your other hormone-producing glands. The outcome of this interaction can make you hot, cold, mad,

bad, thirsty, bored, hostile, in love and ... well you get the picture!

The interesting part is that good hormonal balance is not just about having what might be called 'healthy' biochemical reactions. The way you lead your life and the way in which you react to your life events will also have impact on your hormonal health.

Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) explains how we affect our health by the way we feel and hormonally this means that when you're mean, rude, unjustifiably angry or deceitful in some way, for example, your body will react by showering it with the relative chemical messengers. So, we can cause a hormonal response by the way we interact with life and living. On the other hand, stress, for example, is an internal reaction to an external stimulus which can self-perpetuate action and reaction as the body's hormonal imbalance becomes increasingly affected.

This means that hormones control us and we control our hormones: physically, mentally and emotionally. They truly are a holistic window on health and life itself.

What astonishes me is that hormones have been reduced to such a simplistic level by the medical profession. There are many approaches that can help us through hormonal imbalance and whilst safe hormone supplementation can help enormously it is so important to take a holistic approach through examination of diet and lifestyle factors. Many of us are aware of the xeno (foreign) oestrogens that pervade our environment, our foodstuffs and even our drinking water but now combine that effect with the stress that many of us put ourselves through. Now you have a good idea of how just living everyday life can play havoc with your hormone balance.

So, the next time you find yourself talking to a client or friend about the problems of infertility or early miscarriage, the difficulties of depression or the trials and tribulations of menopause, help them to see how they can build a picture of hormonal balance through a holistic strategy rather than racing off to the doctor for a prescription of synthetic hormones that will ultimately have a cost to their overall health.

For any medical doctors who may find themselves reading this article I'd like to add that the issues of hormonal health provide a fertile environment for building partnerships between doctors, patients and other health professionals. **TT**

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