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A Glimpse into the Emerging Field of Integrative Medicine with Yorktown Physician Minerva Santos, MD

by Kazaray Taylor

Imagine a primary care physician who sends you home with recommendations for herbs, homeopathy, acupuncture, and a plan to not only get healthy, but stay healthy as well. Thanks to the field of Integrative Medicine, doctors like Minerva Santos, MD, are practicing these things with great results. Santos is among many physicians who have chosen to supplement their traditional training with studies at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, created by Dr. Andrew Weil. Graduates of Dr. Weil's programs are able to provide their patients with the best of both worlds – traditional western medicine and complementary healing practices.

A Bronx native who has been practicing medicine in Yorktown since 1992, Santos pursued the Fellowship in Integrative Medicine because patients were asking her about things like herbs and acupuncture, and she wanted to be able to provide



Dr. Minerva Santos

proven protocols. Now she uses the knowledge she gathered at the Arizona Center to advise her patients in these areas with confidence. Says Santos, "If we use an herb, there are the studies to back it up. What we do is based on proven therapy."

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Dr. Santos still prescribes antibiotics and other medications when necessary, but she also guides her patients toward the latest proven complementary medicine practices. Like others who practice Integrative Medicine, Santos focuses on prevention to help keep patients from getting sick in the first place.

There are significant differences between traditionally trained medical doctors and those who've also been trained in Integrative Medicine, notes Santos. "Where traditional medicine trains doctors to look at people as a bunch of cells and not look at what is going on in a person's life to see what may be making them ill, Integrative Medicine seeks to find the underling cause of disease. Is the person depressed? Is it a spiritual issue?"

When people come to her office, Santos may ask questions like: "Do you have any community-based support? What do you do with friends? How do you like your job?" "It's important to look at the person's life and see what is going on," says Santos. "People who are stressed and feel lost don't have things in their lives. There has to be more in your life than going to work and going home."

In the past two years, Santos says she has seen more stress-related health problems in response to the economic downturn, such as irritable bowel syndrome, stomach ailments, headaches, and reoccurring sinus infections. She once asked a patient what was wrong and watched the person promptly burst into tears. "After they had a good cry they said, 'I didn't realize how unhappy I was,'" says Santos. "That realization, and the release, can play a big role in the patient getting better."

Most new patients come to Santos looking for a new primary care physician, citing reasons like "My doctor always wants to give me medicine," or "I'm not being heard by my doctor." According to Santos, many traditional doctors are having a hard time and suffering burnout from needing to see more patients while feeling

less connection to them due to shorter appointments. In a typical day, Santos says her practice sees 20-25 patients, while other doctors may see more than 35. She usually schedules only two physicals a day, because those appointments take more time.

As for tests, Santos routinely checks patients' vitamin D levels, citing reports that say that 95% of the NY population has a vitamin D deficiency. She notes that there is a strong correlation between multiple sclerosis, breast cancer and low serum vitamin D levels, and says that studies are underway suggesting that low vitamin D levels may also play a role in the development of autism.

Santos sees a lot of adrenal burnout and stress in women at midlife, with symptoms like depression, weight gain around the middle, and fatigue. "People need to learn how to relax," says Santos. "It sounds easy, but it's not that easy." She offers weight loss programs that have had great success, and goes on the road to lecture about the need for stress reduction at corporations. "When a company lays off a group of employees, it is stressful for the workers who remain as well, because they are wondering 'Will I be in the next batch of layoffs?'"

When asked if she has plans to expand her practice, Santos says she'd enjoy having a wellness center with modalities like acupuncture under one roof one day. In the meantime, she's happy to be continually learning and loving what she does.

Practicing what she preaches, Santos, makes time for the things she enjoys. Currently, she is writing two books—a romance novel and a science fiction story. She is also a bee keeper, gardener and proud grandmother who makes her own jewelry line, just for fun.

For more information about Dr. Minerva Santos visit MinervaSantosMD.com or call 914.245.6800.