

Short-term Relief Versus Permanent Cure By Steven Coward, ND

How many coffee drinkers do you know who find it easier and easier to get up and get going in the morning? The stimulating effect of caffeine obviously gives you a jolt that temporarily boosts a sluggish metabolism, but what is its long-term effect? Is it a “cure” for sluggishness or a recipe for increased sluggishness and coffee dependence? Find me someone who calls it a cure, and I’ll make a living selling him coffee!

While most people grasp the point of the coffee example, they fail to apply the same thinking to the rest of their health care needs. There is a great tendency in conventional medicine, and to a lesser extent in natural medicine, to try to cure by means of opposites. This is called antipathic medicine, which means medicine that is opposite (anti-) the disease (-pathic). For insomnia we get medicines that induce sleep, for pain we take pain killers, and for constipation we put our faith in laxatives. In the short term, antipathic medicines may relieve our suffering somewhat, but do they produce cures? Sadly enough, the converse is true. They are actually obstacles to cure. The symptoms they are intended to treat usually become more pronounced unless the treatments are continued or increased – just like coffee.

Consider this fact: There were 120 million Americans with chronic disease when they were counted in 1996. That’s 40% of us that have some condition which is conventionally accepted as incurable. So what do we do about that? We take hundreds of billions of dollars worth of “maintenance drugs.” Now I think the original meaning of the term maintenance drug is that it has to be taken for a long period of time. But could there be a more ironic hidden meaning in that the drug actually “maintains” the disease process – as in prolonging or exacerbating it? The answer is obvious. If sluggishness were a chronic disease, we wouldn’t cure it with coffee.

Why do we use so many palliative medicines if they are actually counter-productive? The answer is that we are a quick-fix society. The allure of “lose thirty pounds in thirty days” is more enticing than actually making permanent health-affirming changes in our diets. But who ever “lost thirty pounds in thirty days” and kept it off for thirty more? Our craving for a quick and easy fix might be the biggest societal obstacle there is to permanent improvements in our health.

Consider another fact: The per-capita cost of medical care is rising at double-digit rates every year. How does an effective system of health care cost exorbitantly more every year? If an approach to health care makes us healthier in year A, it should cost *less* in year B shouldn’t it? But does a coffee drinker need less and less coffee to get going in the morning or more and more? Has our medical system taken the bait of the quick fix at the expense of permanent cure?

There is an alternative. The exact opposite of antipathic medicine lies in the aptly-named practice of homeopathy. Homeopathy actually uses tiny amounts of remedies that stimulate a response in the body *similar* to the symptoms being experienced. These

stimulate a balancing response in the body which brings about long-term improvement in health. Raw coffee bean, for example, is used homeopathically to treat certain cases of chronic *insomnia* – just the opposite of the conventional use of coffee.

Interestingly, homeopathy is the only healing system of which I'm aware that has systematically studied the balance of short-term versus long-term consequences of treatment. Perhaps this explains why it has been widely-used for the past 200 years throughout the world, and why it was once the medicine of choice in the United States. Also of interest is the common phenomenon of the homeopathic aggravation. It is not uncommon for people who use homeopathy to feel a temporary worsening of their symptoms before they begin to feel better – the reverse of the antipathic course.

We are a nation of coffee drinkers and pill-takers whose health suffers ever more at the hands of the cures we seek for our ailments. One by one, people with chronic disease and other complaints are choosing a different path which eschews the quick-fix mentality. They are abandoning disease maintenance in favor of permanent healing.