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Practicing in Boca Raton and the Surrounding Community Since 1979

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COVID-19: Office Visits, Vaccines & Staying Safe

The current positivity rate of COVID-19 antigen testing in the State of Florida is over 11%. Palm Beach County was slightly lower at 10.38% but still obscenely high given the goal of less than 5% positivity. The disease is currently so pervasive in the community that it's likely we all know someone with COVID-19.

My practice is offering my patients telehealth visits to remain current. We will make available home lab draws through Apex Labs or Speedy Mobile (they charge a fee). Until we are vaccinated, and have protection (staff and patients), we are advising patients to stay out of our multiuse office building where the occupants seem to feel free to walk around without masks in violation of the Palm Beach County mask order with no-one enforcing that order.

We are still in pursuit of vaccine for the practice. The Florida Department of Health and Florida Medical Society are all making overtures about distributing vaccines. We are evaluating the method of distribution if we receive it. Once administered, it will require a 15-minute post vaccine observation period with the office being prepared for allergic and anaphylactic reactions. The small size of the office, and the desire to keep patients socially distanced and safe, make administering the vaccine in the office problematic. However, we are exploring ways to safely administer the vaccine to our patients when it is available despite the challenges the building and our office suite present.

If this were an Olympic style race, I would say timewise we are in the "bell lap" or last lap of the race. The vaccine is coming, and you have survived by avoiding crowds, socially distancing, wearing masks, washing hands and delaying gratification by postponing family and social visits. This is the time to be more vigilant not less.

Stay home. Do not bring unnecessary individuals into your home. Have supplies delivered if possible. Avoid running errands and travelling outside your home.

If you feel ill, please call me at 561.368 0191. I will be available 24/7 to advise and see you under a safe circumstance if the situation requires it. If you have questions call.

Drug Shortages Exacerbated by the Pandemic

Globalization and overseas outsourcing of manufacturing has resulted in periodic drug and medical supply shortages since 2001. This issue has been brought to the attention of US authorities multiple times with no action on the part of several administrations.

On this blog I have written about the defunding of the FDA so that many of the drug producing factories in China and India have not been inspected by FDA inspectors for quality in decades. Within the last five years the only major producer of intravenous fluids for the United States and Canada, located in Puerto Rico, was shut down after hurricane damage and electrical grid damage. The US Military was impacted by this factory shutdown and tried to purchase fluids from overseas producers, but they were at top capacity and could not meet the demand. There have been critical shortages of morphine for pain control.

The pandemic has further exacerbated this issue. CIDRAP, the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota reported on its website that there is a shortage of 29 of 40 drugs crucial for treating COVID-19 patients. The shortage includes the short term anesthetic propofol, the bronchodilator albuterol, hydroxychloroquine (used for rheumatoid arthritis and certain lupus patients), fentanyl and morphine. The Food and Drug Administration has its own critical list of shortages and lists 18 of 40 on their drug shortage list. An additional 67 out of 165 critical acute drugs are listed as in short supply. This list includes acetaminophen (Tylenol), lidocaine, diazepam (valium) and phenobarbital among the most noteworthy.

As the election for President concludes, it is far overdue for whomever prevails to dedicate one department to evaluate, plan for and prevent critical drug and supply shortages. It is also long past due that the production and distribution of these key pharmaceuticals and medical supplies return to the United States so we are not subject to the whims of a foreign government or find ourselves trying to outbid our allies for supplies.

Michael Osterholm, MD, the director of CIDRAP, sees the coming increase of COVID-19 cases further challenging the existing supply of medications available to the American public.

New Drug Shows Weight Loss Promise

Thomas Walden, PhD of the Department of Psychiatry, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania presented data on weight loss at a Bariatric Medicine meeting held remotely called Obesity Week. It was reported this week on *Medscape Medical News*.

Using the diabetic drug semaglutide (Ozempic), they demonstrated that 75% of the 611 participants lost 10% or more of their baseline body weight. When they used the higher diabetic dosage, 55% of the participants lost more than 15% of their initial body weight and 36% lost greater than 20%.

Diabetic drugs have been used off-label for years for weight loss. Byetta and Trulicity work to reduce weight as well. The real problem with these medications is cost - with a month of Ozempic costing \$800 - \$900 while the other two (Trulicity and Byetta) are more expensive than that.

We know weight loss helps diabetics and hypertensives improve their control and health but there are a limited number of drugs you can safely give a 55-year-old with these types of medical conditions. I was surprised and perplexed when a local bariatric specialist started my 64-year-old patient on an amphetamine for three weeks with their heart rate accelerating and blood pressure elevating characteristics.

In patients, 55 or older, I believe in nutritional counseling first. We have experienced dietitians locally both at our hospitals and private practice who will teach you how to eat correctly and work you to develop a personal weight loss plan.

The retail diets like Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig and NutriSystem work and are safe. However, not all retail diets provide behavioral coaching which is a crucial component for losing weight safely and maintaining the weight loss (not yo-yo dieting).

I have twice now experienced great success with OPTAVIA. The program incorporates Healthy Habits which is an innovative and proven lifestyle approach which gets your mind and body working together. A health coach provides you with personalized guidance for maximum effectiveness.

Their plan uses five of their “fueling meals” plus one “lean and green meal” you prepare per day. Following their plan, **I have lost more than 35 pounds, in just three months.**

I have recently signed up to be an OPTAVIA coach for those patients interested in this program and requiring help and encouragement along the way. Losing the weight is always easier than keeping it off for a “foodaholic” like me but with their maintenance program, and hopefully some discipline, I will keep it off this time.

If you would like to shed those extra pounds, and live healthier, just give me a call. We will discuss the program and how you would benefit from it.

Kiwi Fruit Works for Constipation

The socially delicate topic of constipation was the subject of a research project and presentation at the American College of Gastroenterology by Samuel W. Chey, MPH of the University of Michigan Ann Arbor Health System.

There are many treatments for constipation including encouraging more physical activity and movement, drinking more liquids, adding fiber in the form of more fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain products - including whole wheat breads and prunes and pharmaceutical products. These products all work but patients taking them complain that the medications and extra fiber leave them feeling poorly.

Asian studies have examined the benefits of Kiwifruit (Chinese Gooseberry) and have felt that it provided overall improved efficacy with fewer adverse complaints and ill effects. For purposes of his research, Dr. Chey defined constipation as having no more than three complete spontaneous bowel movements per week. They also looked at stool frequency, stool consistency (Bristol Scale used) and straining for a bowel movement (rated on a 0-10 scale). Success was defined as having one or more bowel movements per week for at least two of the four treatment weeks.

The patients had a mean age of 42.7 years. Participants were 87% female and 77% were Caucasians. Seventy-five individuals participated in the study with 29 on kiwi, 24 on prunes and 22 on psyllium. Those who consumed KIWI had 2 whole fresh green Kiwifruit per day. The prunes group ate 12 Kirkland dried pitted prunes a day or 100 grams of prunes. The powdered psyllium Metamucil type product required 12 grams per day for four weeks.

All the participants had increased frequency of stools achieving success. Stool consistency improved with Kiwi and prunes. There was less straining with all three products.

The key finding was the lack of side effects with the Kiwi. Pain, bloating and gas were most common with psyllium (67%) then prunes (45%) and were least with Kiwi. No one in the Kiwi group complained of abdominal pain while 18% of those taking prunes and 33% of psyllium patients had abdominal pain.

Since intestinal pain fibers are stretch fibers, and the non-Kiwi products produced gas and bloating, this makes sense. Kiwifruit is a natural organic treatment for constipation. Two medium Kiwifruit are about 100 calories.

Keep Your Guard Up As We Begin 2021

As we begin the New Year, my advice is to remain vigilant and patient while keeping your guard up to protect against COVID-19. Most of you have social distanced, worn masks, washed your hands until they are raw and avoided close contact in a social setting with friends and relatives to avoid contracting or transmitting the coronavirus to others.

In a few weeks, the Ellume home test kit should start to appear in pharmacies. The tests results, even in asymptomatic individuals, are remarkably accurate and quick. That test is a game changer.

Many of us have stayed out of restaurants and bars, have avoided theaters and shows, postponed travel and worn masks since late February. The vaccines are beginning to appear in the area and there will be an opportunity during the coming weeks to receive yours. I will provide more details when they are made available to me.

Happy New Year to all my patients, colleagues and friends. I hope 2021 will be sweet - filled with joy and health.

But please, until we have you vaccinated, stay strong and keep your guard up!

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