

Finding an alternative

Aly Cohen bring an organic approach to her practice

By Stephanie Vaccaro

When Aly Cohen was in college, she loved anthropology. But because she knew she wanted to become a doctor, she was only able pursue it as a minor. As she went forward, an anthropological perspective shaped the way she saw the world. When it came to medicine, that meant that after completing her training in Western medicine, which resulted in her becoming a rheumatologist, she started contemplating the lifespan of different therapies.

The drug companies have existed for less than 200 years, while a number of therapies and practices like acupuncture and Ayurvedic medicine have been used to treat people for 5,000 years. And she returned to the quote from Hippocrates who said, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

The first practice she worked in only allowed for brief 10- to 20-minute visits with patients, where physicians really only had time to write prescriptions and couldn't present alternatives to medicine and in some cases didn't even have time to explain why the medicine was necessary.

After five years, with two children, she started questioning whether it was what she wanted to pursue in the long term. “Is this ethically appropriate for what I've been trained to do, what I missed parties for, all the things that I missed so I could become this doctor?” She found herself wondering, is this it?

It was the culmination of her undergraduate education, her medical training, and her professional experience of witnessing a system of fee-for-service (versus one that rewards physicians for keeping their patients well) that led her to strike out on her own and set up an integrative medical practice in Monroe.

Dr. Cohen was the recipient of a fellowship for integrative medicine at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. “As I was leaving this big practice, I was also embarking on this two-year journey with this integrative medicine training,” Dr. Cohen said. “It was perfect because these were people who were coming to the table who were sick of the establishment as well. So, I was with a supportive group of people who really felt that there's always a use for medicine if you need it but there's other things that we could be doing.”

In her practice, she allocates 30 to 45 minutes for each patient. Dr. Cohen, a Cranbury resident, has seen this additional investment of time produce better results in the well-being of her patients. She was able to incorporate what she had learned through the fellowship.

“The practice took off,” Dr. Cohen said of the endeavor that began in July 2011. “It was pretty much sticking very closely to Western medicine, but... with all of my referrals, all the doctors that were very old school, I would slowly introduce fish oil and acupuncture.”

“People started doing really well, and people started sharing the information with friends and relatives and started getting back to their doctors that they were doing well,” Dr. Cohen said. “It bloomed. I could work seven days a week if I wanted to right now. It's just that I don't want to do that because it's stressful to me, and I have to manage that as well.”

“It's hard to find that holistic approach, at least within rheumatologists that I've found,” Dr. Cohen said.

“I think having the added tools in my toolbox helps me to help them not have to get on medicine as quickly or as much, and that's the goal,” Dr. Cohen said. “It's to support or integrate really healthy nutrition, trying to work with them on diet, working on the stress management. I have a whole bunch of tools for that. Using topical instead of orals.”

Her awareness that mankind is essentially organic with the world has led her to give a number of lectures, become a medical liaison for the Environmental Working Group, and she's in the process of writing a book titled “The Smart Human”, which is scheduled for release in January 2015.



“In the last 200 years, we have had more chemicals than in the last two (millennia),” Dr. Cohen said. “Our bodies haven't evolved fast enough to protect ourselves. We have amazing bodies. We have the blood-brain barrier, we have the placenta, which doesn't help that much, but we have skin and all these different defense mechanisms, the liver. But they break down if you're inundated 24-7 with chemicals. It's pseudo-persistent, even if they break down in our body chemically, we're around them so much that they just stay there.”

To make a few immediate changes that would positively impact your body, she recommends:

1. Awareness is key
2. Avoid cooking in plastics because plastics leach into the food
3. Canned foods are all lined with BPA, which is a plastic that coats the inside of every can; including baby formula; most frozen food is as inexpensive
4. Buy organic food; it's the only standard though it has faults
5. Safe Water — Dr. Cohen uses a reverse osmotic water filter removes chemicals from drinking water

For more information see: <http://www.alycohenmd.com/>.