

Integrative Medicine and Mood, Emotions and Mental Health



Anuj K. Shah, MD, MPH^{a,*}, Roman Becicka, MD^b,
Mary R. Talen, PhD^a, Deborah Edberg, MD^a,
Sreela Namboodiri, MD^a

KEYWORDS

- Integrative medicine • Mood management • Herbal therapies
- Diet and supplements • Meaning and purpose • Spirituality • Mind-body therapies
- Physical therapies • Emotional regulation

KEY POINTS

- An integrative approach to patients with mental health concerns or mood complaints involves the presentation and consideration of several different therapeutic modalities.
- Modalities include traditional allopathic pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy but also include spiritual assessments, herbal therapies, nutritional support, movement and physical manipulative therapies, mind-body therapies, and others.

INTRODUCTION

Is allopathic medicine the answer to human suffering? Medical practice is often a tool to address disruptions in the biological system but only sometimes does it focus directly on the suffering itself. It is only one tool among many that can be used to help people manage their suffering. Integrative approaches to health and well-being can help health professionals with multiple ways to help patients in need according to where they are on their journey and why they are seeking consultation. This article presents an overview of diverse approaches to the most common mental health complaints of the authors' patients: anxiety and depression. The aim is to provide some ready-to-use tools for these conditions that can supplement the allopathic approach, including guidance on the use of herbs, nutritional support, mind-body therapies, physical therapies, and behavioral therapies. These interventions are not just for those patients who have failed or are fearful of allopathic medicine. These integrative approaches can be first-line approaches when aligned with a patient's beliefs and culture and, based on evidence, as alternative methods for managing mental health and promoting well-being.

^a Northwestern Family Medicine Residency, Erie Family Health Center, 2750 W North Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647, USA; ^b Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, 303 E Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60610, USA

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ashah@eriefamilyhealth.org

OVERVIEW

In modern Western medicine, physical health care has been divorced from mental health care. Integrative approaches are an important avenue for reconnecting the mind-body-spirit to human functioning. This article proposes a holistic definition of mental health from an integrative medicine perspective and depicts the salient factors and dynamics in this model. A patient-centered example provides the backdrop for how to attend to mood and mental health issues to weave together the different integrative health aspects of care from assessment through intervention. A variety of modalities that have the strongest evidence for effective treatment are discussed.

THE CONTEXT: PREVALENCE OF MENTAL DISORDERS IN PRIMARY CARE

There is strong evidence that primary care is the de facto behavioral health services and care system.^{1,2} It has been estimated that 43% to 60% of patients with mental health problems are solely treated in primary care setting. Studies have also shown that the most effective response to these patients with both medical and mental health symptoms is in developing collaborative, integrated care models in primary care practices.²⁻⁴

Depression, anxiety, panic, somatization, and substance abuse are the most frequently cited mental health disorders in primary care⁴; 80% of people who come to primary care because of emotional and social distress come to their physician about physical signs of mood instability and stress-related symptoms. A majority of patients have no clear organic cause for their physical complaints of depression or anxiety and almost a third of patients present with multiple unexplainable symptoms.³ Pharmacology is the most common treatment intervention recommended for emotionally distressed patients, although less than half of patients follow through with treatment. Consequently, integrative medicine holds promise in expanding options for treating mental health symptoms.

Integrative and Integrated Behavioral Health Distinctions

Integrated health care and integrative health care are 2 terms that often create confusion and need to be differentiated. Integrative health care expands and incorporates treatment modalities that are wider than allopathic interventions for the health of whole persons (mind, body, and spirit). Integrated health care refers to the collaboration between mental-behavioral health and other auxiliary providers (eg, nutritionists and dentists) with medical providers at the level of health care teams and services within an organizational system. There are areas of overlap between integrative and integrated care, especially in treatments that focus on lifestyle and behavioral interventions. This article focuses on integrative care provided within the context of a strong therapeutic relationship.

Mental Health and Integrative Care: A Case Example

Ms Zayas is a 36-year-old Latina. She has 3 children, ages 15, 12, and 9. She lives with her husband, who works long hours and is rarely home, and her mother, who helps care for the children but suffers from diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Ms Zayas has had a fairly stable health history except for hypertension and obesity. She comes to a clinic with complaints of fatigue, restless sleep, and vague aches and pains. On further inquiry she acknowledges feeling depressed about her current situation—financial worries and feeling trapped at home and sedentary.

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