

Anti-aging Medicine Attempts to Preserve Youthful Function at All Ages

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Not so long ago, science fiction movies predicted a future in which supercomputers ran all aspects of society, people communicated from anywhere with hand-held devices, and getting old was no longer inevitable. Modern technology has matched many of those early predictions (Have you used your cell phone yet today?), and, as it turns out, modern health care is beginning to make important strides in slowing the aging process.

The field that has developed around these efforts, known as anti-aging medicine, is drawing more and more chiropractors into its ranks. DCs are finding that the natural approach to longevity, which is the basis of most anti-aging therapies, is a perfect complement to what they already do.

"It's what chiropractors have been saying all these years, but we use the subluxation model instead of the wellness model," explains Philip T. Santiago, DC,

DACBSP, chairman of the American Board of Anti-Aging Health Providers, a group providing advanced training and certification for a range of health professionals who want to learn more about anti-aging medicine.

Dr. Santiago is also a board member of the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine (A4M), which describes itself as "a society of forward-looking physicians, scientists and researchers dedicated to the belief that the process of physical aging in humans can be slowed, stopped or even reversed through medical and scientific interventions....A4M seeks to bring about a profound shift in the medical field's approach to human aging."

While anti-aging medicine is a multi-disciplinary approach, encompassing allopathic fields such as molecular genetics and emerging medical technology, it also places strong emphasis on good nutrition, stress reduction, exercise, and increasing Flexibility-areas that DCs know well. "It involves concepts we've seen before," agrees Dr. Santiago, but it also involves the total integration of these elements. **Ninety percent of anti-aging medicine can be done by chiropractors.**

What's Involved

An anti aging consultation would begin with standard health care procedures-the taking of case and family histories. Then, patients are evaluated according to several "biomarkers," which Dr. Santiago describes as "functionalities that correlate with age," such as blood pressure, motor skills, cognitive skills, body fat composition, strength level, etc. Depending on how the body is functioning-based on information garnered from these biomarkers-a practitioner would determine a patient's "biological" age (as opposed to chronological age) and prescribe an individual regimen that targets areas needing improvement. By re-evaluating those same biomarkers every so often, doctors could adjust an individual regimen to accommodate changes and improvements. This would in turn require doctors to maintain closer relationships with their patients, acting somewhat like coaches to keep them motivated and focused on their goals.

Dr. Santiago stresses that because the biomarkers are measurable, the effectiveness of anti-aging medicine can be proven. In fact, he is currently participating in an A4M research study, called LEXCORE (Life Extension Core of Information), which aims to analyze the outcomes of anti-aging medicine using a large sample of patients. Physicians and medical centers worldwide are pooling data for this purpose.

The Sports Connection

Just as a coach encourages and guides an athlete to improve his performance, an anti-aging practitioner tries to motivate and guide a patient to improve his overall physical and mental functioning, and to alleviate any physical obstacles-pains or strains, for instance-that sometimes come with age and can hinder an individual's ability to live life fully. The coaching analogy is also particularly appropriate for Dr. Santiago, who specializes in sports chiropractic. He actually learned about anti-aging medicine while serving on the U.S. Olympic Sports Medicine Team during the Olympics in Barcelona. It was there that one of the other participating doctors, an allopath, invited Dr. Santiago to his first anti-aging conference. It wasn't long before he realized chiropractors could be real leaders in the emerging field. "MDs are talking our language now [at anti-aging conferences]," he adds. "They're jumping on nutrition left and right."

A major reason for the interest in anti-aging from health practitioners of all fields is the baby boom generation, which is hitting middle age and is, in turn, looking for ways to remain youthful. "The baby boom generation has been the single most significant American demographic trend of the twentieth century," states the A41VI, "and baby boomers are poised to make their presence felt in another arena: medicine."

A4M also points out that more than half of baby boomers use some form of alternative or complementary medicine, and a strong majority favors alternative

medical therapies. Supplement manufacturers, health spas, and gyms have all seen a rise in revenues as the baby boomers seek new ways to ward off aging. Health practitioners versed in anti-aging strategies may also benefit from this interest in new and alternative approaches to health and aging.

"Baby boomers created sports medicine because they wanted to remain active and competitive," explains Dr. Santiago. "They also rejected a lot of rules along the way. They have a lot of skepticism when it comes to institutions telling them what to do. They look for other ways."

Staying Young. Inside and Out

Baby boomers are also serious about looking young, which, Dr. Santiago points out, has contributed to the rise in plastic surgery and procedures such as liposuction. However, that vanity doesn't bother him if it can be used to motivate a patient to take good care of what's inside, as well as what's outside. "My whole attitude is that if I can motivate a patient with vanity, what's wrong with that?"

The future is also a motivating factor. Dr. Santiago says those people who are expecting to live longer and who are putting money away for their retirement should ask themselves what quality of life they want in their later years. And they should start to make changes in their health care right away. "I tell them, `You have a financial portfolio, why don't you have a health portfolio?"

The market for this type of health and preventive care is out there, he says, but chiropractors must be careful not to allow allopaths to seize it from them. "If we don't, as a profession, grab this for our own, the MDs will."



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Dr. Santiago also reasons that keeping up with health knowledge and trends makes a provider more competitive in the health care marketplace, "where managed care has turned doctors into fast-food joints where speed is the objective. Providers will stand out if they give their patients more, such as quality information and effective treatment that produces results that can be measured," he adds. "I don't want to be the McDonald's or fast food of health care. I want to be a five-star restaurant. Doctors who want to be five-star will need to offer people what they want, to cater to their needs in an individual way. I see society going toward wellness. Now is the best time in the world to be a chiropractor."

Dr. Santiago was even asked by two hospitals whether he would be interested in setting up their anti-aging medicine programs. "They're starting to see that MDs are not necessarily the ones with all the answers when it comes to anti-aging and related concepts," he observes.

The growing interest in anti-aging medicine prompted the establishment of a program on the subject more than a year and a half ago at New York Chiropractic College: the New York Academy of Anti-Aging. The program, which takes place over two weekends, introduces participants to the new field's theories and practices. Dr. Philip Santiago, who is a founder of and instructor for the program, says there's talk of creating similar programs at Northwestern Health Sciences University and Logan and Parker chiropractic colleges. For information on the New York Academy of Anti-Aging, call 888/3554-6528.