

What Is Functional Medicine?

The term "functional medicine" was coined in 1993 to describe the medicine of the future. In fact, today many complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners use a functional medicine approach that includes the following:

1. Patient Uniqueness: Each individual is unique. This uniqueness encompasses voluntary activities such as decision-making, personality development, and emotional response, and involuntary activities like metabolism of nutrients, cellular processing of information, and communication among the body's organ systems. Functional medicine professionals realize that all individuals have unique metabolic patterns that affect their health needs, and thus, the concept of individuality is central to every aspect of functional medicine, from clinical assessment to the broad spectrum of treatment modalities.
2. Patient-Centered Approach: Functional medicine practitioners use a patient-centered approach to support wellness. This means that in addition to considering the overall health of the patient, functional medicine practitioners consider the beliefs, attitudes and motivations, as well as the physical, mental and emotional aspects of the patient.
3. Preventive Care: Optimal health is not just the absence of disease. Even the most minor symptoms can foreshadow more serious conditions later in life. This often happens via the "snowball effect," in which a "minor" imbalance within the body produces a cascade of biological triggers that can eventually lead to poor health and chronic illness. For this reason, functional medicine focuses on the prevention, instead of just the treatment, of even the most minor imbalances.

Through changes in lifestyle, environment, and nutrition, functional medicine professionals rely on their knowledge of key physiological, genetic, and biochemical processes for establishing an innovative form of total patient wellness amidst the diversity of interests in health care today.

References:

1. *The Institute for Functional Medicine*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2002, from <http://www.fxmed.com/aboutus/about-frame.html>
2. *GSDL Functional Medicine*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2002, from http://www.gsdl.com/gsdl/functional_med.html