



Healing Journal

A newsletter from Abbott Northwestern's Institute for Health and Healing

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Leadership for the best of all healing traditions

Medical director Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP, leads an integrated approach to exceptional patient care at the Institute for Health and Healing

Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP, joined Abbott Northwestern's Institute for Health and Healing as its first medical director in November 2007. But in many ways, the journey to his new role began more than two decades ago, when Plotnikoff was an undergraduate student at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn.

An essay he wrote on the topic of "Caring Service: My response to human value," earned him a trip to attend an international conference on human values. There, he met world leaders in the hospice movement and was so inspired that he started volunteering at Abbott Northwestern's inpatient oncology unit. As a volunteer, he worked with an exceptional nurse, Karen Harrison, and the hospice director, Howard Bell, an ordained minister, both of whom helped him understand the connection between spirituality and medicine.

"I learned that I wanted to understand better human responses to suffering. So I consciously postponed medical school and attended divinity school. There I studied spirituality, pastoral care, medical ethics and trained as a hospital chaplain," explained Plotnikoff. "Studying hospice and the role it played at Abbott Northwestern changed everything."

After earning a master's degree in Theological Studies from Harvard University Divinity School, he attended the University of Minnesota Medical School, where he also completed his residencies in both internal medicine and pediatrics. He became active in medical ethics issues and, as a resident, joined the editorial board of JAMA, the journal of the American Medical Association.

In 1997, he co-chaired a task force at the University of Minnesota that led to the development of the University's Center for Spirituality and Healing. For five years, he served as medical director of the Center and taught courses on Western herbalism, dietary supplements, medical ethics and spirituality in clinical care. He received world-wide media coverage for his pioneering research on chronic pain and vitamin D deficiency.

In 2002, Plotnikoff received a Bush Foundation Leadership Fellowship and moved to Tokyo, Japan as a visiting professor at Keio University Medical School. "To contribute substantially to patient care, I realized that I needed to learn more about traditional East Asian medicine and spirituality," said Plotnikoff.



Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP

For nearly six years at Keio, he studied and then taught traditional Japanese herbal medicine in Japanese to Japanese medical students and physicians. In Japan, he received several international awards for both research and medical education. In 2005, he was invited to join the Keio Medical faculty as its first foreign member.

"Surprisingly, in Japan, medical students are actually taught to prescribe ancient, multi-herb formulas that are pharmaceutical grade, covered by the national health plan and prescribed by the majority of physicians, including nearly 100 percent of Japanese obstetricians and gynecologists. Yet, no physicians in America knew about these options."

At the Institute for Health and Healing, Plotnikoff will oversee the expansion of the Institute's integrative medicine research, education and clinical care programs with Lori Knutson, RN, BSN, HNC, executive director of the Institute.

(continued on page 3)



Institute for Health and Healing

A Comprehensive Approach to Fitness

The Institute for Health and Healing's LiveWell Fitness Center's staff and holistic approach set it apart

When it comes to choosing a fitness center, new options and facilities seem to be opening up at a record pace. The choices include larger fitness center chains, smaller and minimalist facilities, women-only options and more. Finding the best fit may be confusing and even overwhelming, creating a barrier to getting started on a sustainable and healthy fitness routine.

As part of Abbott Northwestern's Institute for Health and Healing, the LiveWell Fitness Center offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to fitness. "When people come in to see us at the LiveWell Fitness Center, we're not thinking of exercise by itself," explained Susan Masemer, manager of the center. "We look at all of the issues: nutrition, weight management, resilience and other potential health issues including elements of depression. Our approach is to look at the complete person and to help them achieve their lifestyle and fitness goals."

From the outset, the LiveWell Fitness Center was designed and constructed to be a healing place with unique programs and services. Options range from metabolic rate assessments, body composition analysis, nutrition counseling, to individualized services of a personal trainer, group fitness classes and more.


"When we work with people we give them recommendations and put them on a program that is scientifically and medically sound," said Masemer. "Part of that is a thorough assessment in which we identify needs that may not be obvious to the client prior to their session. For example, individual metabolic rates may vary by as much as 500 calories per day as compared to others of the same age or weight. If someone is off of their target by just 100 calories per day, it could add up to a 10-pound weight gain over the course of a year. For others, they may not be getting enough calories or exercising too hard, which leads to frustration and people dropping out of their fitness routines. Goals and measurements are scientifically-based and go well beyond the number on the scale.

"Participants always find it helpful to learn more about the scientific aspects of how and why their body functions the way it does," said Masemer. "This helps them understand better why they need a more specific plan to meet their personal needs and goals."

As a fitness center based at Abbott Northwestern, the facility also plays an important role in the health and well-being of Abbott Northwestern's own employees and physicians. For caregivers, the center offers a convenient way to bring balance back into their lives and set a good example of health for others.

Nurses, physicians and other health care professionals frequently recommend the services of the LiveWell Fitness Center for their patients. Individualized programs are then designed consistent with the patient's care plan and unique situation.

According to Masemer, the biggest and most important differentiation between the LiveWell Fitness Center and other options is the caliber of the staff. The center boasts an impressive team of health care professionals with advanced, specialized degrees in exercise physiology, nutrition and physical therapy. Recently, a mind-body expert joined the team to help people address the issues of adhering to exercise and nutrition plans. The center is also involved in a number of research projects with Abbott Northwestern, including Allina's Sister Kenny™ Rehabilitation Institute.

"We are addressing all areas of health—mind, body and spirit," stated Masemer. "We also practice practicality at the LiveWell Fitness Center. We teach people at all levels how to creatively work fitness into their busy lives. Every bit adds up and leads to a healthier lifestyle." 

For more information on the LiveWell Fitness Center's programs and services, see the class schedule on the back page or call 612-863-5178.

Driven by Research and Outcomes

Each month, the Institute's 45 integrative health professionals care for more than 1,500 hospitalized patients and nearly 700 patients at its Outpatient Clinic.

Inpatient services include acupuncture, massage therapy, guided imagery and energy work to nearly 15 percent of all patients hospitalized at Abbott Northwestern. In addition to these services, the Institute's Outpatient Clinic offers biofeedback, two forms of

traditional Asian medicine, healing coach sessions, therapeutic yoga, nutrition consultations as well as physician and nurse practitioner integrative medicine consultations.


The Institute recently added an important member to its team to direct world-class, innovative integrative medicine research—Jeffery A. Dusek, PhD, from Harvard Medical School. As the director of research, Dusek oversees the new Integrative Medicine

Physiology Laboratory and leads research efforts made possible through Allina's electronic medical record, Excellian.

The Institute's research partners at Abbott Northwestern include Minneapolis Heart Institute®, Virginia Piper Cancer Institute, Sister Kenny™ Rehabilitation Institute, Emergency Department, WomenCare and the Spine Institute. The Institute also maintains close relationships with Harvard University's Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Mental Health services at Allina's United Hospital in St. Paul and Keio University's International Kampo Research and Education Center in Tokyo, Japan.

"Abbott Northwestern is now poised to excel in its commitment to offering patients integrative medicine services with a commitment to research that emphasizes caring for the whole person," said Lori Knutson, RN, BSN, HNC, executive director of the Institute.

From this foundational work, the Institute, Abbott Northwestern and Allina will partner with governmental agencies, insurance companies and others on research required for system-wide recognition of integrative medicine's contributions to health and healing.


Philanthropy plays a vital role in patient-focused research, according to Dusek. One example is philanthropic funding for the Institute to partner with Abbott Northwestern's Emergency Department on a study to evaluate how integrative medicine influences health and healing in fast-paced, emergency care. "This is just one example of the type of research that requires philanthropic partners to thrive," said Dusek. "The Institute is now poised to develop a strong base of scientifically, quantifiable evidence in integrative medicine for the benefit of patients at Abbott Northwestern and beyond." 

Leadership for the best of all healing traditions

(continued from page 1)

"We are so pleased to have Dr. Plotnikoff join our team," said Knutson. "He's not only a talented medical director, but also an internationally respected physician who recognizes both the value of conventional medicine as well as the value of complementary care when dealing with patients' complex needs."

Plotnikoff brings a wealth of experience and training to the Institute, which has grown significantly since it was formed in 2003. He is the author of more than a dozen textbook chapters and three dozen articles in the medical literature. "I strongly believe that a focus on patient-centered, relationship-centered care will help both our patients and our health care professionals," he explained. "In addition, we have an opportunity to enhance care and reduce costs through low-cost, low-toxicity non-pharmaceutical interventions."

Philanthropy plays an important role in supporting the Institute's work. "We are so grateful for the generous financial support of the community," added Plotnikoff. "The integration of healing therapies and relationship-based care will lead Abbott Northwestern, Allina and even the nation to a new model of care benefiting each patient, their family and the broader community." 


Sharing Best Practices: The Institute joins the Bravewell Clinical Network

Abbott Northwestern's Institute for Health and Healing recently joined the Bravewell Clinical Network—a group of eight leading clinical centers across the country that deliver integrative care.

The Network was formed in 2003 with the intent of helping the centers develop successful models of integrative medicine care delivery and to share best practices broadly within the field. As part of the Bravewell Clinical Network, the Institute joins seven other leading integrative medicine centers including Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine and Osher Center for Integrative Medicine in California, Center for Integrative Medicine in Maryland, The Continuum Center for Health and Healing in New York, Duke Center for Integrative Medicine in North Carolina, Alliance Institute for Integrative Medicine in Ohio and Jefferson-Myrna Brind Center for Integrative Medicine in Pennsylvania. Representatives from the Network meet twice each year and work together on common initiatives.

The Bravewell Clinical Network has also launched Bravenet, a new practice-based research network that will help advance integrative medicine by providing clinical use, clinical outcomes and cost benefit data that has previously not been available to the medical and scientific communities.

As part of Abbott Northwestern Hospital, the Institute for Health and Healing is the only member of the Bravewell Clinical Network directly connected to a hospital. Officials from the Bravewell Clinical Network will visit Abbott Northwestern this spring to share information, resources and ideas.

The Bravewell Clinical Network operates with the philosophy that fundamental lessons learned at the eight centers should be shared to the benefit of all, according to Jeneen Hartley Sago, program officer. The Network recently released a groundbreaking report, "Best Practices in Integrative Medicine: A Report from the Bravewell Clinical Network," which outlines the best practices of leading integrative medicine clinics across the country. 

Institute for Health and Healing

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From the Institute for Health and Healing

The Institute for Health and Healing is supported by the financial generosity of the community. To make a donation to the Institute, call the Abbott Northwestern Hospital Foundation at 612-863-4126.

LiveWell Fitness Center Classes

12-Week Weight Management Program

Spring session begins week of April 21

Tuesday, 4-5 p.m. or

Thursday, noon-1 p.m.

Take Action is a highly successful program of action for people who want to lose weight and keep it off. The 12-week Take Action Program was developed around extensive research on permanent weight loss. Participants learn the skills they need to manage their weight, including a regular program of exercise, healthy nutrition and lifestyle modification. Healthy habits are developed and reinforced through group support and weekly sessions covering nutrition and behavioral changes. This program also includes an individualized fitness profile, personal training session and nutrition consultation.

Call 612-863-5178 to register.

Fee: \$299 Member

\$349 Non-member

W.O.W. (Working Out with Weights)

W.O.W. is perfect for individuals who are new to strength training or anyone looking for more variety in their training program. Classes will focus on proper technique, safety and keys to successful program design. W.O.W. class includes four one-hour, small group sessions, program exercise booklet, skinfold body composition measurement, and an introduction to free weights, BOSU, body bar, balance board, machines, tubing, stability ball and proper stretching.

Classes offered at a variety of times.

Call 612-863-5178 for more information.

Fee: \$50 Member

\$70 Non-member

LiveWell Fitness Center's Programs and Services

The LiveWell Fitness Center offers a wide array of special programs and services. Nutrition counseling, personal training, comprehensive fitness assessments, metabolism testing, body composition analysis and group fitness classes are just a few of the offerings. A more complete description and fee schedule are available at the center's reception desk or call 612-863-5178 for more information.