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Lemole: The 'healer' makes the heart surgeon tick

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"I didn't think she was crazy. I thought she was uneducated in medicine, buying this system, and she didn't have the education to make a good choice," he said.

"Doctors just don't have training in natural," Amis Lemole said.

Healing herbs have been ignored, she said, because they can't be patented, so drug companies aren't interested and don't put up the money for scientific tests and trials.

Reinforcing resistance, she said, is the way "most people want to go to a doctor and get a prescription. 'I'll want to take a pill.'"

But the hard work of changing lifestyle and diet can "make an enormous change in people's lives... complement what we have in medicine," she said.

More than 20 years ago, when the medical establishment scoffed at Nathan Pottberg and disciples, Jerry Lemole, under his wife's influence, began putting his heart-surgery patients on a low-fat diet. He ignored the threats of prominent Philadelphia cardiologists to stop referring bypass candidates if he continued to order such a restrictive diet. And his surgical reputation forced them to back down.

Today, all heart-surgery patients are on healthy diets, at least as long as they are in Christiana Hospital. And while Lemole advises most patients about vitamins and supplements, he prescribes them for high-risk patients like Pottberg.

How patients are treated

When Pottberg saw Jerry Lemole only last spring, her blood tests showed she was in virtual liver failure. A nonalcoholic she had advanced "cardiac" cirrhosis, liver hardening and failure caused by her heart failure. Her body could not tolerate surgery. In fact, during one hospital stay she had suffered cardiac arrest, because her liver could not metabolize heart medicine and the normal dose built up in her blood and poisoned her.

Lemole knew he could fix her heart, but she was in a Catch-22 situation: The only way he knew to reverse her liver failure was to repair her heart, but her heart could not be repaired until her liver failure was reversed.

Janis Lemole suggested he have Pottberg take capsules of milk thistle, a wildflower, and honey doses of certain vitamins and minerals. Lemole took her advice.

Pottberg knew something about herbal medicines, and went home with enthusiasm to try the regimen, her only choice.

Six weeks later, when she returned to Delaware, her blood test showed near-normal liver function.

She had the surgery.

During her hospital stay, Pottberg heard cardiac staff talk of Janis Lemole, her influence on her husband, and her only known failure: The surgery continued to insist on skin milk, not apple juice, on the morning cart.

Janis Lemole, 46, without makeup, looks 40. Her thick, about-the-length-of-her-fingers white hair shows above her white blouse. She is tall, slim and graceful, even in a worn white "Fresh Vegetarian Society" T-shirt and faded jeans.

Only their youngest child, Christopher Robin, a college freshman, still lives at home, but the house in Harrington, Va., Pa., on a farm that has been in her family since she was 7, holds with her two children, from 11 months to 10 years, and a menagerie of five-ranging animals: cats, dogs, guinea pigs, horses, ponies and "a rooster."

Although the location means more than an hour of a chaotic commute home, it is the Jerry Lemole and from Christiana Hospital, the farm is close to Janis Lemole's 82-year-old mother, and the family's Swedish-born church and 10th school and junior college.

But Janis Lemole does park her husband's lunch every morning.

Lemole, in his surgical scrubs with paper boots over his shoes, was sitting on one of Janis' wooden chairs — a cup of organic bean soup, no lightbulbs, a sheet of cardboard, a bean cracker, two organic carrots, big enough for a horse, a jumble of pink grapefruit sections, and a plastic sandwich bag of vitamins and minerals.

He finally became a vegetarian more than 10 years ago, he said, long after Janis Lemole and her six children stopped eating meat.

"Little by little, the fat got closed. No meat. No chicken," he recalled with a grin. "I was never her about 15 years ago, I said, 'Haven't I suffered enough?' This is ridiculous!"

But his family showed he knew the protest was in vain.

"I became a vegetarian 18 years ago," Janis Lemole said, sitting in



Dr. Nathan O. Pottberg, cardiac surgeon at Christiana Hospital in New York, has endorsed alternative therapies espoused by his mother-in-law, Janis Lemole.



Cheryl Pottberg, pictured with her daughter Amy on Staten Island, N.Y., was virtually in hysterical despair before Jerry Lemole's herbal regimen.

her kitchen.

Eighteen years ago, she was driving home after leaving the children at school and switched on the radio to hear a man talking "only did raised cattle. I grew up having meat three times a day, but then, that day as I was fixing the children's lunch, I suddenly I knew I didn't want to eat meat again. That was it."

She is now well-versed in reasons why people should avoid meat, but at the time her decision was instinctive. "I didn't want to kill animals or eat them. I eat fish sometimes, but I wouldn't eat it if my children were starving. I'd only eat fish if I had to."

She also converted her son-in-law, Oza, married to her oldest child, Lisa, a veterinarian as are their three daughters.

"I'll be about the same," said another Lemole daughter, Laura, who designs jewelry in California, and was home for a weekend. Lisa and Laura had just returned to get a cup of tea — black tea, despite her mother's plea that she have more healthful green tea.

The origin of the Lemole goats — they had as many as 27 at a time — was a family trip to safari park in Florida.

"As the family drove down a dirt road, they had to stop as keepers took a nonvegetarian 'dinner' of a best of five goats, across the road to the lion."

"Jerry, we can't let those goats be. We have to save them," Janis Lemole said.

"If we save those five goats," her husband pointed out, "they'll just bring out another five."



Janis Lemole and daughters Lisa Oza (left) and Emily walk around the farm that's been in her family since she was 7.

That he and Oza, top surgeons and leaders in a highly objective discipline that is at least in stereotypical, proscribed with scientific technique, have embraced alternative medicine is somewhat unusual.

But across the country, doctors are now beginning to look beyond scientific principles to gain a fuller understanding of healing and health.

Medical schools — including Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia — now offer classes in alternative or complementary medicine. The federal Office of Alternative Medicine, mostly roll-leg-educated whites under 50, now spend \$10.3 billion a year.

Physicians' opposition to alternative medicine is falling, Lemole said, because "patients are demanding it. I think we're all going to have to rethink our emphasis."

Doctors have realized alternatives, he said, because they "are trained in the scientific method: hypothesis, thesis, proof, results that can be reproduced."

"If you think you are the expert in your field, which is really just a small piece of the universe, and then you're looking across to some field, you think it's either not doing your job," because you don't know it.

Jerry Lemole, the son and brother of pharmacists, learned from his wife that "magnesium can fight arrhythmia better than va-

positive medicine. I must have done patients who are off their arrhythmia medicine because they take it."

An 83-year-old man from Florida, whose heart was but for needed constant oxygen, hoped Lemole would operate. But Lemole agreed with Florida surgeons that surgery would be too risky.

"So I put him on vitamins," Lemole said. "The next thing we know, a big crane of grapefruit arrived. He's off oxygen and hasn't felt better in years."

When Jerry's mother was unable to speak or move and doctors thought she had had a stroke, Jerry Lemole got his hands on her hospital chart.

"He told her doctors, 'She has a bad stroke.' And told them to give her an IV of sodium and vitamins," Jerry Lemole said.

"Soon Mother was talking and completely normal. This is the kind of thing he sees. He has vision. He has a creative mind."

They both believe a good life and health depend on having physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of your life in order, Janis Lemole said. "The spiritual is the most important. It sets the whole direction of your life."

"To be a good person is to be of service," she said.

And Pottberg agrees. Until her heart problems forced her to stop working two years ago, she was a columnist for a weekly newspaper on Staten Island. Now that she is doing well physically, she is finishing college in New York, getting a degree in social work, and applying to Harvard Law School.

"If I don't get into Harvard, I would like to go to a job in Delaware, in social work, to pay back something of what the state did for me."

At Christiana, she said, she got her life back.

"I can't begin to tell you," Dr. Lemole and her team and that hospital performed a miracle.

And, she said, she one day wants to meet the women behind it all, Janis Lemole.

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