

# 5 Reasons Why We Need to Think to Be Healthy

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*“For many, health may not be the most important thing in life, but without it, nothing else matters. And when you have good health, pretty much anything is possible” (Perlmutter, 2013)*



The 2017 IACESA Conference focussed on *The Teaching of Thinking: Co-constructing and re-defining pathways to make an impact*. The fourth conference sub-theme was a fresh, but cutting-edge, theme that has not yet been explored by IACESA or at IACESA Conferences. This theme aimed at creating an awareness of the role of critical thinking to promote optimal health and well-being. Five reasons why this theme is of ongoing importance and requires thinking, are:

## 1. Chronic disease is on the rise and is this century's greatest challenge

The world is changing and so is medicine. Chronic disease is both the largest killer and the largest healthcare expense in the modern world. Chronic disease will cost our global economy \$47 trillion over the next 20 years and kill twice as many people as infectious disease (Bland, 2014). According to Bland (2014) chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune diseases, digestive disorders, dementia, asthma, arthritis, depressions, attention deficit disorders, allergies, Parkinson's disease, etc. now affect one in two Americans and the numbers are rising despite new drugs and procedures. In South Africa, the numbers are increasing too. 35 million South Africans have Autoimmune Diseases. Cancer affects up to 9 million and heart disease up to 22 million (<http://drgrantfourie.co.za/autoimmune-health/>). **Are you or a family member affected by a chronic disease? Do you suspect that you might be at risk for developing a chronic disease?**

## 2. Conventional medicine is not going to solve the problem

Mark Hyman (in Maskell, 2016) states that medicine must adapt to meet the challenges of this century's greatest challenge, namely chronic disease. Conventional medicine, geared to the acute care of infectious illness or health emergency, will not be able to solve the health care problems of the future. Medicine must evolve to meet this challenge as our health span (length of time an individual lives a disease-free life) might not equal our life span (total amount of time spent living, regardless of health status) (Bland, 2014). A new paradigm for creating health is needed and a system that considers

the root causes of disease, as opposed to simply treating symptoms and acute disease (Maskell, 2016). **Are you relying on conventional medicine? Are you or a family member taking medication without considering the root causes of the disease/problem?**

### **3. Functional medicine is the medicine of the future**

According to the Institute for Functional Medicine, Jeffrey Bland coined the term Functional Medicine in 1990 and founded the Institute for Functional Medicine in 1991. The Institute defines Functional Medicine as a personalized, systems-oriented model that empowers patients and practitioners to achieve the highest expression of health by working in collaboration to address the underlying causes of disease. Mark Hyman (in Bland, 2014), states that Functional medicine is about getting to the root of symptoms and restoring balance. It is not just about giving drugs to treat symptoms, but about asking a different set of questions to discover underlying causes for symptoms and diseases. Blum (in Bland, 2014) believes that Functional Medicine is a paradigm-changing-twenty-first-century medical model to treating chronic illness. The rapid growing number of Functional Medicine practitioners and researchers all report on the critical role of nutrition, lifestyle and environmental factors in determining genetic expression and influencing health status (Bland, 2014; Hyman, 2008; Myers, 2015; Ornish, 2007; Pedre, 2015; Permuter, 2013 & 2015). **Did you know about Functional Medicine? Do you know a Functional medicine practitioner in your area? Have you done any research about Functional Medicine?**

### **4. Chronic illness will require long-term management and self-management**

The leading sources of morbidity, premature mortality, and high cost of care in developed countries around the world for chronic diseases persist and progress despite the best conventional treatments, but are eminently preventable and at times reversible, with lifestyle as medicine (Katz, in Maskell 2016). Chronic illness will therefore require long-term management, actually self-management, by the patients themselves. **Are you managing your chronic disease via nutrition, exercise, your lifestyle, etc? If you do not have a chronic disease, what are you doing to prevent a chronic disease and to promote optimal health?**

### **5. Many people, even professional people, lack critical thinking skills or do not think critically about their own health and well-being**

Brookfield (2012) reasons that if you cannot think critically your survival is in peril because you risk living a life that – without you being aware of it – hurts you. Optimal well-being is one of the most important, yet neglected, topics that require high quality critical thinking. Our decisions about diet, exercise, and other lifestyle behaviours have a direct effect on our optimal well-being (and the optimal well-being of other people) and in the absence of well-being we must make decisions that can have an effect on our future health and well-being (Brettenny, in Grosser 2016). According to Paul and Elder (2014) we have to design and control our lives, become effective decision-makers and gain insight into our lives as a whole as the most basic patterns of thought and behaviour in life represents the most basic decisions we make. Paul and Elder furthermore believe that critical thinking enhances the rationality of our decisions, but when we make decisions or choose values that harm our well-being (such as eating unhealthy or smoking) we make irrational decisions. Facione (2015) argues that it is of national interest to try and educate all citizens to think critically and for the prevention of chronic

disease or self-management of chronic disease, it is of critical personal interest too. **Do you have a clear goal for your health? Do you think about your health and well-being daily?**

Seen in the light of the mentioned reasons to 'think to be healthy', regular contributions related to this topic will be posted on the IACESA Face Book page for the next few months. The information must not be viewed as medical advice, but will merely be to create a deeper awareness about the role of critical thinking to promote optimal health and well-being and to contribute to the Evolution of Medicine.

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