

HYLA CASS, M.D. a WOMAN on A MISSION

by Lyle Hurd, editor

Hyla Cass, M.D., is an oft-quoted expert in the field of integrative medicine. In addition to her busy practice, and nationwide lectures and media appearances (CBS news, MSNBC, PBS), she has written 10 books, including *St. John's Wort: Nature's Blues Buster*, *User's Guide to Herbs*, *Natural Highs*, and *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health*. She is also a former Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and past president of Vitamin Relief USA.

I first met Hyla Cass at a complementary and alternative medicine conference in San Francisco in the spring of 1999. She was a featured speaker and gave a terrific lecture on the imperative of treating the whole person, not just the disease. Her first article, "Women and Depression: Choosing Complementary Care," appeared in the October issue. Since then Hyla has been an invaluable asset to the magazine as a contributor, consultant, introducing us to numerous other writers, and most importantly as a missionary with magazine in hand at the 20–30 health oriented conferences and expos she attends each year.

TH: Dr. Cass, how did you happen to become such a crusader for the reform of conventional medicine?

Dr. C: I am frequently asked that question. The fact is there was no single turning point or moment of enlightenment. It has been a long process, beginning with my earliest family life. My father was a general practitioner who practiced out of our home in Toronto, Canada. From an early age, I recall following him around on his medical rounds at the hospital and going along on house calls. A caring and conscientious GP in an old-fashioned practice, I saw him practice integrated medicine long before that term was coined. Available and responsive, he ministered to his patients with care and skill. He would talk to me about what he was doing, assuming I understood, and never talking down to me. Looking back now, I realize as the doctor's apprentice, I learned a great deal about the spirit and art of medicine, and even about the practical aspects of diagnosis and treatment.

TH: Dr. Cass, in your articles, at your lectures, on the media, and your Web site you often state that we are in the midst of a health care revolution.

Dr. C: Yes, a revolution that is rapidly replacing the outdated concept of doctor as authority figure, with a more balanced view of doctor as health partner. This new paradigm allows greater self-education, self-care, and shared responsibility, while



Jeff Ham Illustration

offering an opportunity to heal our health care systems, our communities, our planet, and ultimately, ourselves. At the heart of this exciting transformational process is a new vision of health care.

TH: Please explain this new paradigm in more detail.

Dr. C: There are almost 109 million women over the age of 18 in the United States. Because of our fast-paced lifestyle, the accelerating pressure of career, family and relationships, and the shift toward more quality in our social structure, we develop more health concerns by the day.

We are also more susceptible than men to many conditions, including depression, chronic fatigue syndrome, weight gain, and of course, hormonal swings. I hear the same laments over and over from young women, middle-aged women and older women, whether in my office, by e-mail, at public appearances or even at social gatherings:

"I'm always tired—it doesn't matter how long I sleep!"

"I can't catch up on everything I need to do."

"What can I do about my weight problems? I'm disgusted with myself!"

"I'm always feeling down in the dumps."

“My whole body hurts! If it’s not my back, it’s my shoulders or my feet.”

“My PMS is actually getting worse as I get older!”

“I have absolutely no sex drive!”

“I had no idea menopause would be this bad. Between the hot flashes and night sweats, I’m miserable!”

“I’m totally confused about hormone replacement therapy. My doctor says there is no other choice—either take HRT with its risks, or suffer!”

And, from most of these women I hear, “My doctor says they are just signs of normal aging or that I’m just stressed and depressed, meaning that—it’s really all in my head.”

Nonetheless, problems with fatigue, sleep, anxiety, depression, weight, pain, hormones, and memory, are real and often debilitating. Part of the problem is that most doctors simply don’t have time to delve into the reason for these symptoms. They may have only 10 minutes to hear out a patient, make a diagnosis, and then prescribe a pain medication, a diet pill, an antidepressant, or a sleeping pill.

If you have felt frustrated at not being truly heard, and discouraged that everything you’ve done to try to solve your health problems has failed, take heart. You’re not alone, and you’re not without tools to become your own health detective.

I have devised the “Vibrant Health Plan” based on my decades of experience in treating hundreds of women of all ages. As a conventionally trained physician with a specialty in psychiatry, I have incorporated nutrition and other natural techniques into my practice for more than 20 years.

At the core of this practice is a set of beliefs that have served my patients well:

1. Treat the whole person—mind, body, spirit and environment.
2. Look for the deepest root problems beneath the symptoms, which includes using the best that science has to offer.
3. Apply a continuum of treatments, always beginning with the safest, most natural and most benign.

TH: I assume that while women may be more susceptible to certain health conditions the imperative of incorporating this new paradigm applies to all persons.

Dr. C: Absolutely. Patients don’t walk into our offices as disembodied heads. Our bodies do not separate into specialized compartments for the convenience of cardiologists, allergists, endocrinologists, or gastroenterologists. You can’t get to the right diagnosis and treatment without looking at all systems.

Every symptom reflects an imbalance somewhere in the body’s systems. Conventional medicine has segmented the body into the various specialties, and has not addressed the fact that the body is actually a set of interactive systems.

On the other hand, holistic or integrative medicine addresses the interactive systems of the whole person. The patient is evaluated in a variety of ways, and supplied with specific health prescriptions—for supplements, foods, exercise, natural hormones, mind-body techniques, and even prescription drugs when indicated. Moreover, the individual has to partner with the doctor in this process, both to carry out the regimen, and to give feedback in order to fine-tune their program.

Compared to drug therapy, natural treatments offer safer,

more user-friendly solutions, with far fewer and less harmful side effects. They work with the body’s chemistry rather than adding what can be toxic substances to an already impaired body. After writing *Natural Highs*, I realized that people needed combination formulas to simplify their supplement program, so I developed my own supplements based on the book, and later, on *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health*. They can all be found on my Web site.

TH: Ann Louise Gittleman, Ph.D., CNS, describes your best-selling book, *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health* as follows: “Here is THE BOOK for women whose symptoms their doctor just cannot explain—let alone ‘cure.’ You really can discover what your true problem is, and find safe, natural solutions, backed by research and by Dr. Cass’ years of clinical experience. I wish there were more doctors like Dr. Cass!”

Jacob Teitelbaum also states, “Get the vitality and joy that you want—and deserve! Dr. Cass will help you add in the critical treatments and lifestyle changes that your doctor simply doesn’t know about.”

TH: Please give us an overview of the Vibrant Health Program and its comprehensive resource section.

Dr. C: It is a women’s take-charge program to correct imbalances, reclaim energy, and restore well-being—a powerful plan to overcome hormone imbalance, weight gain, mood swings, low energy, and other health concerns.

Whether you suffer from PMS, menopausal symptoms, loss of sex drive, chronic fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, depression, headaches, weight gain, persistent pain, or many other common conditions, *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health* helps you get to the root of your problem. Imbalances in 10 basic areas—including hormone levels, immune system, neurotransmitters, digestion, and lifestyle—can be the hidden causes of your symptoms.

The book provides an integrated approach to restore body balance and general health, incorporating the best of conventional and alternative methods, self assessments and other powerful diagnostic tools to identify specific imbalances and their triggers, guidance on restoring body balance with diet, detoxification programs, nutritional and herbal supplements, bio-identical hormones and lifestyle changes, and expert advice on when to consult physicians and how to partner with them to achieve vibrant health.

The “Where to Look in Health,” or resource section includes how to find an understanding doctor, diagnostic testing laboratories, compounding pharmacies, companies who produce highly effective supplement formulas, informational Web sites, and a comprehensive guide to choosing supplements, including Dr. Cass’ own.

TH: Dr. Cass, thank you for your commitment to vocalizing the imperative of a new wellness paradigm as the answer to our burgeoning health care dilemma. Thank you for your *8 Weeks to Vibrant Health* program. And thank you for your support and critical input to *totalhealth* magazine over the past eight years.

Dr. C: You are welcome. I would like to invite the readers of *totalhealth* magazine, as well as those individuals who they feel would also benefit, to visit www.cassmd.com. ■