

## An introduction to Environmental Medicine...



Hello! My name is N. Thomas LaCava, M.D. The purpose of this presentation is to introduce our Environmental Practice to you and give you some background on our philosophy of practice. By doing this, I hope to help you decide whether it would be useful for you to come to this office as a new patient. The satisfaction of seeing a patient get better is a very important part of our practice, so I want you to clearly understand our approach to illness before you come in so that you are certain that this is the right place for you.

We have two treatment processes here, our preventive medicine process and our environmental medicine process. The remainder of this message describes environmental medicine. If the preventive process is the option that best suits your needs, you can find additional information under the Preventive Medicine link on our website.

Most of the patients we encounter have had their symptoms for months or even years. They have tried and failed with the conventional approaches to their problems. We consider it our specialty area to look for unconventional approaches to chronic symptoms. Some patients are looking for miracles, however I must caution that we have no more of these than anyone else. Other patients want to simply take a pill or have a surgical solution offered to them. Just treating your symptoms with pills and/or surgery does not satisfy us. We will work to help our patients regain their health by addressing the causes of illness. Please note that we ask you to do a lot on your own behalf. It is very likely that we will recommend a drastic change in your diet for a week or two to see if food allergies contribute to your symptoms. Please consider carefully whether or not you are willing to try to make lifestyle adjustments of this magnitude in order to become well. We will try to make this office a comfortable place for you to come as a patient, and a healthy place for both you and ourselves. Our physical and emotional health is also important, so we make an effort to provide a clean environment free of scented chemicals (such as perfumes, scented toiletries, etc.) and tobacco smoke.

As far as my background information, I graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a degree in Electrical Engineering. I worked for a few years as an engineer before attending and graduating from Saint Louis University School of Medicine in Saint Louis, Missouri. I performed my internship and residency at Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia and a Child Neurology Fellowship at St. Christopher's Hospital for children. I am board certified in both Environmental Medicine and Pediatrics. I practiced for ten years as a primary care pediatrician in central Massachusetts until a patient of mine led me to a more effective way of dealing with some hard to resolve recurrent childhood problems. This was a case of an eight-year old boy who was failing the third grade soon after he started in September. The educational authorities tried to imply family discord as a reason for the boy's poor school performance. When his mother convinced me that this was unlikely to be the problem, I referred him to the Gesell Institute for Human Development in New Haven, Connecticut. After nine months of very unconventional

approaches to medicine, education, and psychology, this child passed the third grade, ranking number one in his class!

I was so pleasantly surprised, that I visited the Gesell Institute to learn from them and their medical director, Dr. Sidney Baker. Dr. Baker referred me to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, which has been a continuing source of refreshingly innovative, scientifically progressive, and professionally rewarding solutions to difficult health problems. My patients have been the benefactors of what the Academy has taught me. Working with these physicians, I learned that for some diseases there are effective remedies that are not yet in the medical textbooks. Sometimes there are explanations in the form of food or chemical sensitivities, Candida yeast overgrowth, parasites, faulty nutrition, and hormonal or metabolic disorders. I do not mean to imply that there are not illnesses exactly as described in textbooks or that there are complete answers to every chronic condition. However, I do emphasize that stress and psychosomatic factors are not the only things to consider as causes of chronic disease.

I am in private practice, although there is a network of physicians practicing similarly across Massachusetts who are rich resources for my patients and myself. My practice presently consists two-thirds of adults, and one-third of children, coming from a wide region throughout the Northeast. I have treated hundreds of environmentally ill people, many of whom have high-grade allergies, extensive food allergies, chronic infections, and chemical sensitivities.

As noted before, I've committed this practice to a specialization in the diagnosis and treatment of chronic disease. The word disease can be broken apart to "dis ease", meaning something uncomfortable and unhealthy. For our patients, many times that means they have symptoms that do not fit neatly into a medical textbook. They may simply be bloated, tired all the time, depressed, headachy, or they feel that their brain just doesn't function well. In my experience, nearly everyone who has had a chronic disease has more than one reason for his or her symptoms. We call this their "total load". By "total load", we mean all the factors work together to cause a person to have symptoms.

For example:

A factory worker who had asthma as a child might regularly be exposed to fumes at work. He is allergic to the family cat. He's been drinking milk without knowing that he's sensitive to it, and he is under financial stress because of bills from an automobile accident two years before. The mold that has been growing since his waterbed recently began to leak causes him some moderate allergic reactions. Now, when this man has an escalation of marital discord, he may start again to have asthma. The marital discord may get most of the attention for the asthma development, but wheezing might never have occurred if the other factors did not exist.

This example was chosen to emphasize that emotional stress can be important, but it is not often the only cause of the disease. Because of the need to consider many factors that can potentially cause disease, the type of medicine that I practice is both more complex and more individualized than it was when I treated with only conventional medical approaches. Each person I see is bio-chemically and emotionally unique, with their own set of responses to factors in their environment. It takes time to sort this out.

To describe the change in the way I practice, I will use headaches as an example. When I was practicing as a conventional general pediatrician, it was not hard to diagnose a migraine. There was a short list of medications, which I would prescribe, in order to see how the patient would respond. At that time, I made no attempt to understand the cause of the headaches. I would only treat the symptoms with medication. Whenever I knew a diagnosis, I would proceed to treat the patient with medications as they were outlined in a standard book of medical therapies. It did not really require much of my time. Medications have side effects and, of course, I had to understand

these. However, it did not take long to look them up. If the patient did not respond well to the medication, or had unacceptable side effects, that was unfortunate, but I had gone as far as I had known how. Similarly, if a patient came in with something that I could not diagnose, I had no way to deal with their problem because to get a list of possible treatments, I had to have a diagnosis.

Today, I find it not so critical whether the headaches are migraines or some other type. The "diagnosis" as listed in the book, *International Classification of Diseases*, is not so critical for the type of practice in which we engage. What is of more significance is an answer to these, among other, very important questions.

1. When did the headaches come on?
2. What were you doing in your life when they came on?
3. How have the symptoms changed when you had a lot more stress or a lot less stress?
4. What has been the effect of changing jobs or your living environment?
5. Does diet modification help to relieve your symptoms?

The answers to these questions provide clues that I will explore with tests and therapeutic trials. The important difference is that I am now looking for the cause of these headaches.

Because you are unique, it often takes time to find the answers. Once that has been done, often medications are no longer needed. I must caution you that usually environmentally related symptoms vary from hour-to-hour, or day-to-day. If there is no variation in your symptoms, I would be concerned that your case is not an environmentally caused disease. (In this case, you would want to visit the Preventive Medicine link of our website.)

For example, a few years ago, a fifty-five year old man began to have headaches, which gradually got worse, and basically did not change from one day to the next. Changes in diet and environment made no real difference. A benign brain tumor was eventually found. This reminds one to be cautious if symptoms don't change much day-to-day.

Because there is a slight wait for an initial visit at our office, and if your symptoms don't usually vary, we ask that you consult a competent specialist, in order to rule out non-environmentally related causes of illness. You may have already done this within the past few months, so it may not be necessary to repeat the process. Please note that day-to-day variation is a critical variable in diagnosing environmentally related illness. If your symptoms are up and down, reflect upon the best day that you have and remember that your body is, at the very least, capable of functioning on that level. My goal is to understand you well enough so that together we can achieve this level of functioning all the time. Of course, we always hope that symptoms improve beyond your current best day.

I must inform you that I consider myself to be your consultant in Environmental Medicine and am generally not your primary care physician. Although we often work intensively on many of our cases, emergency care will still need to be coordinated through your primary care physician's office. If you have an urgent question that you feel only we can answer, we will return your call as soon as time permits depending upon the immediate demands of patients currently in our office. Calls are returned within a few days.

Because of the many factors in most chronic diseases, you will receive an extensive questionnaire and a diet recall list to complete. In addition, please complete a chronological

summary of your past medical history. Our patient registration form will also need to be submitted to the office. We can mail these forms to you, or you can download them from the Comprehensive Environmental Medicine link of our website.

The completed package of paperwork needs to be returned to our office before your first scheduled visit with us. Payment arrangements must be agreed upon prior to your visit. If we have a contract with your insurance carrier, we will bill them accordingly. Otherwise, payment is required at the time of your visit, unless other arrangements have been made.

In reference to your initial consultation at our office, my goals for that time are simply to develop an understanding of your problem and to develop a preliminary and rudimentary plan of attack. You may not be familiar with this type of environmental relationship, therefore in the initial interview we will try to gain an understanding of your dietary patterns, any history of hospitalization or drug use, the effects of different environments, and how you perceive the effects of various environmental and chemical exposures. We want to obtain a reasonable knowledge of the kind of house or apartment in which you live and the kinds of exposures that you might encounter at home or at work. This is in addition to a general review of other symptoms. At the end of the first consultation, we hope to have gathered a lot of useful information. To do this thoroughly requires time, particularly if you have symptoms that have lasted for several months or even years. For this reason, your initial visit at this office will require one or two hours. Your cooperation in returning the necessary forms, mentioned above, in a timely manner will help expedite the data gathering process.

Usually during the initial consultation, an overall physical examination is usually performed. The last few minutes of your appointment may be used to recommend options that may help to reduce your symptoms. You are welcome to bring an audio recorder for later review, or to share with relatives that are not present at the appointment. In the end, it is your decision as to which recommendations, if any, you choose to pursue. With chronic illnesses, we generally find that patients need to make changes in their lifestyle in order to gain improvement in symptoms. Usually the more serious the symptoms, the bigger the changes in diet and/or lifestyle will effect you. Whether or not these changes become permanent depends upon the results they have on your illness, and your ability to maintain them.

Dietary improvements are the most common recommendation we suggest to patients. This could include avoiding anywhere from two to twenty-five foods, depending upon your sensitivities. Unfortunately, the foods that cause the symptoms are often times the foods that are eaten most frequently. For this reason, these changes tend to be very difficult and must be gradually implemented as new information is learned about your own health status.

Synthetic chemicals are another possible source of symptoms. Sometimes it is easy to remove damaging chemicals from your home, but other times they are built-in and are difficult or impossible to remove. If the chemicals causing your symptoms are suspected in your workplace, a whole different set of challenges arises. This can be discussed with you during your appointment, if necessary.

To better explain our position in your treatment, we see our role here as that of a mechanic. We will try to help you do what you can to be free of symptoms. If you are functioning below freeway speeds, we will try to get you tuned up. If you have been in the breakdown lane, we'll try to help you get going again. You will have to do much of the work. If you don't want to do more than take a pill or two, your desire for easy answers is certainly understandable. However, we have to warn you that we will expect much more than that. In the long run, we will probably make recommendations aimed at slowing the process of aging, or preventing future disease. This will also involve changes towards less refined, less chemically-contaminated foods and the addition of nutritional supplements. Several visits to our office are often necessary to achieve the best outcome.

The type of medicine we provide here requires a lot of listening and it cannot be mass-produced. Our expenses are similar to those of other Environmental Physicians' offices, and the primary way to meet those expenses is through charging for our time. We ask that you pay at the time of service for any in-office services. We find that encouraging financial responsibility is an important part of the healing process. If for some reason you cannot fulfill your financial responsibilities with our office, other arrangements need to be made in advance. Please be sure to keep your address, phone number, employment, and insurance coverage information updated with us. The minimum fee for your initial consultation does not include any laboratory or allergy testing. After the initial interview, professional fees are based upon time spent with the physician.

If you request or we suggest telephone appointments, these are charged as telephone consultations and are not compensated by any insurance. The intent is to take as little of your time and limit the amount of driving you do, while still receiving good healthcare.

Moreover, we have no financial relationship with any of the outside laboratories to which we direct you, so there is no billing for laboratory tests through our office. As such, any issues with payment for these tests have to be addressed directly with the laboratory. Laboratory results are discussed at your follow-up visit, unless there is an urgent issue that cannot be prolonged. Please note that laboratory results are **NOT** discussed over the telephone. If you require a report on laboratory tests before your next scheduled appointment, there will be a charge for the time involved with reviewing and responding to the results. We do not order standard or routine laboratory work-ups, in an effort to make your evaluation as economical as possible. Generally, your primary care physician will have these tests on file at their office. It would be helpful to bring these to your appointment, if possible. We do not need to repeat any laboratory tests if you bring those results with you.

Sometimes we may suggest to you purchase books or supplements through our office. We do this as a convenience to you, but you are certainly welcome to purchase them elsewhere.

In conclusion, if for any reason you decide not to come to our office for Environmental Medicine, then we thank you for your interest and wish you success in finding the answers that will improve your health and well-being. On the other hand, if you decide that there is value in working with us, then let me be the first to say **WELCOME!** Please do your homework by filling out and returning the necessary paperwork. Feel free to browse our website for other helpful information about the Francis Holistic Medical Center, P.C., and keep checking back, as new information is added often. We look forward to seeing you soon!