

OUR BEST DEFENSE

By Nancy O'Brien

Medical Homes come to Bethesda Naval Medical Center

The decades-long work of Dr. Jim Gordon weaves its way in and out of the story of Bethesda Naval Hospital's Medical Home. Dr. Gordon, who has been fighting for health care transformation since before leading President Clinton's White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy in the 1990s, says, "The time is right for Yoga teachers as well as Yoga therapists to see themselves as part of the healthcare system." Maybe it's true.

In the outpatient clinic in the midst of the sprawling National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, a conference room has been transformed with paint, low lighting, a fountain—and a vision—into a meditation room. Patients and clinic staff retreat to this space, an oasis in the midst of a vast military medical complex, a healing environment central to one of the most innovative patient-centered outpatient clinics in America: the National Naval Medical Center Medical Home.

A medical home is an exciting and relatively recent innovation in health care delivery, and Bethesda is leading the way. The model for a medical home is a holistic team approach to patient-centered primary care. Medical homes gained exposure—though no real legislative boost—during the long debate surrounding the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act of 2010. Despite its scant presence in the act's final version, the debate served to spread the word on the merits of this evidence-driven model. Yoga therapists take note: *you, too, could be working soon at a medical home near you!*

Weekly, whenever a series of mind-body skills classes is being held here, the patients in the meditation room can be soothed by the sound of the fountain and learn such mind-body practices as biofeedback and deep relaxation. The medical home's patients are active duty military and their dependents or retired military and their dependents.

Patients range in age from 18 into their 90s, and their ailments span the full range of clinic woes from sniffles and coughs to respiratory problems and chronic conditions like diabetes. They come to the meditation room, where they will hear guided imagery, perhaps a belly-softening de-stressing meditation, or practice a breathing technique such as some that have proven effective for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They will talk about what is happening in their lives and about integrating these mind-body techniques. They will be empowered by all-around holistic support from a carefully selected team from their doctor's office to be a partner in their own healing.

And by the time you read this, if all went according to plan, Bethesda's medical home will have hired a Yoga teacher as a full-time staff member. With benefits!

At Bethesda, "our hope is that the Yoga teacher would be on board by September [2010]," said Lt. Meghan Corso, a clinical psychologist with the medical home. The Yoga teacher will join a clinic staff that, in addition to Corso, already includes a nutritionist and a pharmacist as well as four teams of practitioners who together will become the patient's medical family. Each team is composed of a licensed practical nurse, three health care providers (the term

providers as used at Bethesda means only doctors, physician's assistants, and nurse practitioners), two administrative assistants, and one registered nurse. The goal is to create one team for each patient, at one place of care, known as a medical home.

This strategy of one team and one place reduces referrals while connecting a patient with someone they're familiar with and who will answer their questions. The structure helps create healing relationships of trust and familiarity between patient and provider that can serve across all stages of a patient's life.

The options of seeing more health care providers and the nutritionist, the pharmacist, and soon, the Yoga teacher, at one time and sometimes even in the next room makes it easier for the patient, Lt. Corso explains. Corso is looking forward to being able to include Yoga in the suggested interventions and strategies medical home staffers can offer their patients for a host of conditions that can range from chronic pain to heart disease.

The medical home's leadership team will depend on the Yoga teacher brought in to help establish the structure of the clinic's Yoga offerings. Weekend and evening Yoga classes as well as symptom-specific programming are already part of the game plan, however.

The idea of including a Yoga teacher was not part of the original vision by the medical home's co-founders, Dr. Sunny Ramchandani, a lieutenant commander with 16 years of service, and Navy Cmdr. Kevin Dorrance, a doctor at the National Naval Medical Center. First, came the Ten-Page Memo.

Dr. Ramchandani, who, through his Indian ancestry is no stranger to Yoga, tells it this way: He and Dr. Dorrance agreed that huge "holes" existed in the delivery of care to their clinic's patients. Dr. Dorrance came across a 20-page document by the American College of Physicians describing the concept of a medical home (see sidebar: Learn more about Medical Homes). Inspired, the Navy doctors put together a ten-page memo and sent it up the chain of command. "Go for it," was the response.

It wasn't until the doctors visited Alaska in 2008, though, that they set their sights on bringing integrated care (a service that com-



Dr. James Gordon (center)

bines medical and behavioral health services to more fully address the spectrum of problems that patients bring to their primary medical care providers) into the medical home model. The doctors were won over after meeting Dr. Doug Eby and seeing the positive outcomes integrated care and alternative practices were creating with the Native American population at the Central Foundation's medical home in Anchorage, Alaska. Then, says Ramchandani, "We realized the importance of integrated care and complementary and alternative practices for our patients."

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Having spent 2009 serving in Afghanistan, Ramchandani missed a lot of the incremental progress at the clinic, but was happy to be back to find progress on the Yoga teacher component of the plan. That was in April—just a short two-and-a-half years since the Ten-Page Memo. Already, Dr. Ramchandani relates, the Navy is now saying it will use Bethesda's medical home model of health care delivery going forward. There are plans to expand to another outpatient clinic of 12,000 patients at Bethesda and then another outpatient clinic, until everyone in the naval hospitals' outpatient primary care clinics has medical homes.

BEYOND BETHESDA

Health care expert and Yoga practitioner Ellen-Marie Whelan of the Center for American Progress, who can cite chapter and verse on what is in and out of the new health care reform act, says Bethesda is the first medical home she knows of in the United States to bring a Yoga teacher on staff full time. She has long seen the potential for Yoga teachers to fit right into America's health care picture, perhaps now more than ever because of—and in spite of—the new health reform law.

In fact, the health care reform act does fall short in the eyes of medical home advocates. The American Academy of Family Physicians expressed its disappointment, saying in a March 21 news staff story on its website that "the medical home provisions in the legislation are limited to high-need beneficiaries and, thus, do not go far enough." But Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD, in her address to the Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative in March, called on providers to lead the way with innovations such as the medical home model and other patient- and family-centered structures, despite the legislation.

As Whelan sees it, the debate and high-stakes legislative process that surrounded the health care act "tapped into the innovation that's out there" with providers. Now, an acupuncturist with a massage technique who is able to turn a breech baby or a Yoga teacher able to guide a returning service member toward breathing in a way that reduces his or her symptoms of PTSD are among those highly trained, nontraditional health care professionals who will more often be part of the more integrative approach that clinics like the Bethesda medical home adopt.

Whelan does see the new act broadening opportunity for practitioners such as Yoga teachers and Yoga therapists in its inclination



Bethesda's Medical Home co-founders:
Dr. Sunny Ramchandani (top)
and Dr. Kevin Dorrance (right)



to leave licensing and certification issues to the states. She sees the law supporting such potentially yoga-teacher-friendly reforms as the "bundling" of payment for a series of health care treatments (for instance, pre- through postnatal services); accountable care organizations that group providers together, and transitional care providers who apply a proactive approach to post hospital care.

To Whelan, the heart of these innovations is better primary care. And, she says, "The best primary care prevents you from going to the hospital."

With more evidence and exposure adding to a broader acceptance of Yoga's effectiveness in prevention, which has the capacity to translate to preventing hospitalization, preventing surgery, preventing or ameliorating chronic disease, Whelan says Yoga teachers can and should now be seen as part of the delivery of primary care.

The health reform act can be credited, as well, with fostering one big change that is expected to create a more efficient platform for evaluating pilot projects that research the effectiveness of integrative care practices. Instead of pilot projects having to be passed by Congress and regularly reauthorized, pilot projects such as those going on in medical homes across the country, including at Bethesda—even though the Bethesda medical home comes under the Department of Defense budget, and as a military installation, is basically unaffected by the new health care reform—will now be evaluated relatively quickly through the Center for Medicare and Medicaid. Good practices can be replicated and bad ones halted without the political fallout a visit to the Hill would create.

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These reforms included in the new law and many that lay bruised and battered but still breathing outside its current reach are prying restricted-access medical doors open for Yoga teachers. The hard work of setting the stage for more Yoga providers in more medical settings has been carried out through the end of one century and into the beginning of another by leaders in the various fields of complementary, alternative, and integrative practices, most notably in this case by Dr. Gordon.

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Gordon has trained some of Bethesda's staffers and he has been helpful in advising the medical home's leadership. The model used in Bethesda's mind-body classes is the one developed-in this case, specifically for work with military populations-by Gordon's Center for Mind-Body Medicine in Washington D.C.

Lt. Corso is looking forward to training at Gordon's Center for Mind-Body Medicine in D.C., and a number of staffers throughout Bethesda's naval hospital have already participated. Some of the mind-body skills classes at Bethesda's medical home are being held as part of Mind-Body Medicine certification, a training and supervision program that usually takes about two years to complete. Thirteen Bethesda staffers from throughout the hospital have gone through the center's initial five-day training, with four staffers having completed the advanced training.

Those drawn to the center's training include physicians, nurses, counselors, acupuncturists, recreation and occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, and Yoga teachers. It teaches a broad range of practices and takes self-care to heart. Every day of training begins with Yoga instruction and practice.

The work initiated by Dr. Gordon that has taken root and flowered at Bethesda's medical home has enormous implications for Yoga therapists as the profession develops. Gordon likens the seemingly slow pace of this development to his own Yoga practice, which started forty years ago: "I think how strange it was then. Now it's happening everywhere."

To get there, Gordon urges all those interested in making Yoga a more sustainable component of patient care to look to what's next. He sees the future of Yoga as therapy as one of combining practices and approaches and in focusing on prevention. Gordon believes Yoga should and can be a part of all health care, saying, "It's just a question of flexing the muscles."

With patience that comes from decades of applying steady effort with a heavy dose of nonattachment, Gordon can be forgiven for displaying a bit of reserve regarding Bethesda's full-time Yoga teacher component. With his deep-rooted gentleness, he says, "I don't know whether people will pick this up, but I hope this will be a model for medical homes all over the country." **YTT**

Photo credits
Lt. Corso (see page 2): courtesy of Bethesda Naval Center
Drs. Ramchandani and Dorrance: courtesy of Sean Lynch
Dr. James Gordon: Center for Mind-Body Medicine
Writer, Nancy O'Brien: Sally Morrow Gomez

LEARN MORE ABOUT MEDICAL HOMES

An everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know about the Navy's Medical Home platform can be found on the NNMC website. Access this information by clicking on the National Naval Medical Center Medical Home logo on the naval hospital's home website or use this link: www.bethesda.med.navy.mil/Patient/Health_Care/Medical_Services/Internal_Medicine/Medical_Home.aspx

Here, you can track the birth of Bethesda's Medical Home. You will also find the proposals and charts for numbers of teams covering numbers of patients, prognostications, tables, job descriptions, and goals. Some of these documents, happily, include the term *Yoga teacher*. Other gems to be found are the formative Ten-Page Memo, a video of interviews with patients and staffers, a Plan for Measuring Outcomes, and a Delivery System Design Breakout.

Those interested can also link to the standards and guidelines for medical homes established by a consortium of physicians' organizations called Physician Practice Connections-Patient-Centered Medical Home (PPC-PCMH), a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance.



Nancy O'Brien, a health writer and Yoga teacher who credits Yoga with her ongoing recovery from serious illness, has taught at Bellevue Hospital's World Trade Center Clinic, the hospital's Parkinson's Support Group, and its Mind-Body Program. She also teaches a Yoga for Arthritis workshop at Integral Yoga Institute in New York City and has taught at senior centers and bedside at Coler-Goldwater, the city's long-term nursing and rehab facility. Nancyobrienyoga.com

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1 Tricare, the insurer of qualified non-active duty patients, states: "Tricare does not cover Yoga outside military treatment facilities, but active duty service members, family members, and others in the medical home may be referred to the classes for treatment as appropriate."