

Doctor's vision for healthcare includes mind, body and spirit

By CATHERINE IDZERDA (Contact) Monday, March 15, 2010

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JANESVILLE — Some people seem born for their jobs.

Everything about them breathes their profession, and they have that happy energy that comes from liking what they do.

Carrie Kaiser is one of those people.

Kaiser is the newest practitioner at the Janesville Naturopathic Clinic, 4539 Woodgate Drive, Janesville.

Quiet but not shy, Kaiser has a thoughtful presence that encourages the sharing of confidences.

That's a good thing: Naturopathic medicine is based on a mix of centuries-old healing techniques, scientifically proven practices and a variety of other natural methods.

Most importantly, it's about treating the whole person: physical, emotional and spiritual. To understand the whole person, practitioners listen to what their patients are saying and what their bodies are telling them, as well.

The mind/body connection isn't hocus-pocus. Doctors from prestigious institutions such as the Mayo Clinic have long acknowledged the link between mental/emotional health and physical health.

In 1999, the UW-Madison Medical School established the Mind-Body Center with a \$10.9 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

The UW Health system has an "Integrative Medicine" program. It's motto is: "Mind, body, healing."

What makes Kaiser's story so engaging is the way her life choices lead to her present job: listener and healer.

After getting a bachelor's degree in biology at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn., Kaiser wanted an interlude of meaningful work before heading to medical school.

The Peace Corps was her choice, and she spent three years teaching science in Samoa, an island between New Zealand and Hawaii.

"I remember when I was accepted into the Peace Corps, I called my parents and said, 'I'm going to Africa!'" Kaiser said. "And my mom said, 'You better stop at the

Photo 



Photo by Dan Lassiter

Dr. Carrie Kaiser talks about stress relief to a group at Book and Brew in Milton. Kaiser recently joined the staff at the Janesville Naturopathic Clinic.

library first."

After returning home, she worked at a University of Minnesota research lab and as a volunteer EMT in rural Minnesota.

She loved the sense of camaraderie the EMT job provided. She worked shifts two to three days long with the same group of folks, responding in the middle of blisteringly cold January nights to house fires or snowmobiles through the ice.

All the while, her life was beginning to shift.

"I've always had a social justice bent, that's undeniable," Kaiser said. "I was really spending more time invested in social justice causes than studying for my MCATs."

During that time, she met a Sinsinawa Dominican Sister. The order has long been committed to creating a "holy and just society."

She became a candidate and then a novice in the order. The sisters encouraged her to get a master's degree in theology at the Aquinas Institute in St. Louis before going to medical school.

"My thesis was on medical ethics, and I was writing these papers looking at the conventional medical system," Kaiser said. "At the same time, I was working as a technician in an emergency room and seeing how things were done."

Her advisor, Sister Mary Margaret Pazdan, was concerned about the vein of frustration that ran through much of Kaiser's written work.

As an ER technician in a community hospital, Kaiser saw care that involved "utter separation of the body from the spirit, from the community, from relationships."

It wasn't that the staff didn't care.

"So many of the nurses and doctors want to do so much more, but they're confined by insurance coverage, confined by how much time they have and confined by what resources they have," Kaiser said. "A community hospital doesn't have the same resources as a research hospital."

Instead of giving a falling-down-drunk a meal and a bed for the night, medical staff wanted to give an alcoholic a chance of recovery.

Kaiser's advisor finally got her to articulate "her vision for health care values."

At the core was her belief that medicine and healing are about relationships—your relationship with yourself, your God and your provider.

She wasn't—and still isn't—opposed to traditional medicine, but she saw herself in a different role.

"My heart goes out to MDs," Kaiser said. "When you're limited to seeing somebody for 10 or 15 minutes, all you can do is get the nuts and bolts—where does it hurt, how long has it hurt, what makes it feel better. Many of my MD friends feel terribly confined by that."

She, on the other hand, has 90 minutes to two hours with each patient.

"With the society the way it is, everything is fast. The Internet is fast, people drive fast on the highway, pharmaceutical medicines are very powerful and very fast—and they're not always inappropriate," Kaiser said. "We would never do anything to discourage a person from working with a doctor, or suggest that they change a treatment protocol a doctor had given them."

It's not us versus them, it's us and them.

Kaiser got a doctorate in naturopathic medicine from the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Ore. She spent three years in private practice in California and is board certified by the North American Board of Naturopathic Examiners

She is licensed by California as a primary care physician.

Along the way, she made the difficult decision to leave the Dominicans.

"I found my relationships with the sisters very life-giving," Kaiser said. "I found my relationship with the church ..."

She paused for a long moment and then finished her sentence with, "... not very life-giving."

Back in the Midwest after so many years, she thinks she's found the right place to be a listener and healer for body, mind and spirit.