

Primary Care Cures

Episode 107: Dr. Ashley Maltz

Ron Barshop:

You know most problems in health care are fixed already. Primary care is already cured on the fringes, reversing burnout, physician shortages, bad business models, forced buyouts, factory medicine, high deductible insurance squeezes the docs and is totally inaccessible to most of the employees. The big squeeze is always on for docs. It's the acceleration of cost, deceleration of reimbursements. I want you to meet those in this show that are making a difference. With us, Ron Barshop, CEO of Beacon Clinics, that's me.

Ron Barshop:

So in the economy today, what is the iceberg we can see? Well, we can see the record profits of the bigs: the big health systems, the big insurers. This is actually turned into a golden era this pandemic, turns out. So when you add in the hospital Marshall Plan of 175 billion clams, which had no quid pro quo for the rest of us, it's actually bigger than the real Marshall Plan in inflation-adjusted dollars. So that one gave us key trading partners of enemies, added world peace to capitalism and democracy. Okay.

Ron Barshop:

The massive iceberg that's unseen is that poverty has doubled according to the World Health Organization. We've also lost 10 years of employment gains worldwide. In the US, we have 60 million that are collecting unemployment, which is 12 times the norm. We have 90% mass transit ridership drop. For example, the New York subway system has a \$16 billion shortfall, and the airlines are losing \$80 million a day.

Ron Barshop:

A third of all routes are gone. 60% of all restaurants, according to Yelp, are permanently closed. And 6 to 12 million evictions are predicted this month, December. It's historic because it's never topped 3.7 million in the history of America. Bankruptcy filings are up 50% month-over-month. Suicide hotlines are up 800%. Alcohol sales are up 800% and we have 3.6 trillion in federal debt, more than we had this time last year.

Ron Barshop:

The untold unmeasurables or buildups, and especially mental health, of cancer and heart treatment and testing, all the kinds of labs. These are the rat and the snake. It's huge, the deferred tests and the labs. So that's all the under the iceberg massive stuff.

Ron Barshop:

Above the iceberg are these highly visible profits, business as usual, and below the iceberg is unprecedented desperation, displacement, physical and financial marginalization. Can we just call evil, evil sometimes?

Ron Barshop:

Okay, on a happier note, I can't wait to introduce you to very sunny Ashley Maltz. And Dr. Maltz started the Austin Wellness Collaborative, which are 1400 healers from every possible walk of homeopathic and traditional allopathic medicine. She's double boarded in internal medicine and integrative medicine (and that requires a fellowship, by the way). And if that's not enough, she has a Master's in Public Health. Her practice is all about chronic care management and primary care, but she also does medical acupuncture and trigger point injections and mind-body medicine. And she completely follows evidence-based medicine versus woo-woo stuff. Welcome, Ashley Maltz.

Ashley Maltz:

Hi. Thank you. How are you?

Ron Barshop:

I am fine. Well, I'm tempted to tell you what's not fine because you have such a broad experience, but before we get into what you do and how you organized Austin, Texas, we really don't know what's brewing under the iceberg. Do we?

Ashley Maltz:

Well, we never really knew or know. So, now all we can do is just do our best and keep going, right?

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. Well, so let's talk about Andrew Weil, a lot of you may recognize the name. He's a doctor who popularized this mind-body connection and Deepak Chopra has popularized Ayurvedic medicine. Do people come to you and say, "I'm looking for somebody in those fields," or do they come to you and say, "Can you take care of me yourself"? Or how does that work when they come to see you?

Ashley Maltz:

It ranges. You know, I did my fellowship at the school that Andrew Weil founded, Dr. Weil, in Arizona. Along with a concurrent integrative medicine fellowship at Stanford Hospital in Stanford, Connecticut. And so I've had a lot of training from amazing mentors. So people are seeking out a new kind of way to have a relationship with a doctor: (a) they want more time with their physicians and their healthcare practitioners in general, and (b) they may not want to be put on medications right away or have invasive procedures or surgeries, things like that. So people are seeking out alternatives and that's where they end up in my office.

Ron Barshop:

Well, I had the opportunity about a year ago to be in not only Sri Lanka, but also China, within the same week. So I got to experience for my tinnitus, which is really my only medical issue that I know of, I got to deal with Eastern medicine and Ayurvedic medicine. And I got to tell you, in both cases, they got rid of it for a while. It's not a permanent cure, but they gave me some concoctions that really made for the first time in my life, a difference.

Ashley Maltz:

That's fantastic because honestly, that's one of the hardest diagnoses to treat. I have not had great success with treating tinnitus. So I'd love to know what they used. And I do refer a lot out to people who specialize in those types of medicine. I don't have to know it all, but I definitely like to have my resources.

Ron Barshop:

Oh, the Eastern medicine doc, he felt my pulse. He had me stick out my tongue. He asked about my bowel habits. He looked at my tongue again, and then he asked me a couple more questions I couldn't understand. Then he made a concoction that had me going to the bathroom pretty much all the rest of the week. It was a pretty strong potion, but I learned, never schedule a food tour right after you've seen Eastern medicine doc.

Ashley Maltz:

Oh, wow.

Ron Barshop:

Yeah. It was something straight out of an old Indiana Jones movie...

Ashley Maltz:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ron Barshop:

... but it worked.

Ashley Maltz:

Yeah.

Ron Barshop:

All right. So you put together this collaborative. Tell us a little bit about the Austin Collaborative.

Ashley Maltz:

So the Austin Wellness Collaborative came as an idea in a conversation I had with a massage therapist friend, as he was giving me a massage. It's not a relaxing massage, the kind that he gives, but we were just talking through it and the pain. And he posed the question, what does networking look like versus collaboration? So what are those? What's the nuance difference?

Ashley Maltz:

Later that day, I had an idea to create a Facebook group with all the incredible healers I had met in Austin who were doing such awesome work. And it just kind of organically grew into... This was back in 2017, so it's been about three years and it's grown, now we are about 2000 participants in the Facebook group. We have a membership where people can advertise to the

group and on our social media channels and where we highlight our members. And we were having monthly meetups prior to Coronavirus pandemic. And it was a really nice community of people and we can share ideas and resources and referrals. So, that's where that came from.

Ron Barshop:

Okay. Well, let's talk about your own brand of medicine. What is it that I think separates you from other functional medicine is you seem to do a lot of this yourself, or do you have other staffers that are doing the acupuncture and some of these other... the medical acupuncture and the trigger point injections?

Ashley Maltz:

So I learned those specific techniques in my fellowship where I had my hands on patients every single day and was using needles and trigger point injections and acupuncture, as well as mind-body techniques and regular clinical medicine.

Ashley Maltz:

That being said, I do some medical acupuncture. I am not an acupuncturist. I did not go to Chinese medical school for four years and learn all of the amazing techniques that are in there ranging from dietary changes to herbs to massage techniques. So, I don't call myself an acupuncturist. And if I feel like I need someone who can do Chinese herbs or a more specialized version of acupuncture, then I for sure refer. We do have one amazing acupuncturist in our clinic, Jameson James. So he is my go-to currently, but there's some that specialize in fertility and some that specialize in cardiovascular health. So I choose what the patient needs, basically. I pretty much do everything else myself: nutritional guidance, ordering supplements, labs, all the functional medicine, interpretation and guidance with patients.

Ron Barshop:

So medical acupuncture is something that we learned Crossover Health is doing out of California. They're all across the country, now. They're at the Amazon fulfillment centers and headquarters, and they're at LinkedIn and Intuit and a bunch of other Silicon Valley. And that's part of their everyday practice.

Ashley Maltz:

I used to work for Crossover Health. So I'm very [crosstalk 00:09:13] familiar. Yeah, it's a great, great organization. I was going to be doing it at one of the sites, but I ended up leaving that work for another opportunity and it never came to fruition, but here we are.

Ron Barshop:

Do you think medical acupuncture is something that we're going to see a lot more of in this country?

Ashley Maltz:

Absolutely. I would say just even acupuncture in general. Insurance is covering it for certain conditions. Medicare has come out with guidelines for it, for chronic pain, I believe, or low back

pain. So at least it's one condition that can be treated. There are millions of people with those, with chronic pain and low back pain. So it's really exciting. Personally, it's one of my favorite tools to use, because it gets people out of their heads. I think we, as a culture, we think too much and we're constantly perseverating and thinking and worrying and there's so much information coming in that we really need to get into our bodies and out of our minds.

Ron Barshop:

So Eastern medicine is a good example of getting into your mind and out of your body. And of course, if you live in most Asian countries, you have your choice of Western medicine center, Eastern medicine, you can go in door left or door right? So evidence-based medicine is what you and most Westerners follow. Do you think that evidence-based medicine is someday going to absorb more and more of these Chinese and Asian practices like acupuncture?

Ashley Maltz:

Well, there's actually quite a lot of evidence for the use of acupuncture. So, what's happening is it used to be a shunned tech, all these things were shunned, and now they've built up such a case with the evidence that we can no longer ignore how effective these techniques are. Granted, they may not work for everyone. And granted, they may have some adverse effects for some people, but how many medications have side effects and bad effects or don't work for some people.

Ashley Maltz:

Oh, thousands, so many. So to me, it's a really cheap cost-effective way to reduce pain, anxiety, get people sleeping better, balance their hormones. And it really helps in those regards. Those are some of the biggest lifestyle issues we see today, so if we can get even just a fraction of people feeling better, I personally think it's well worth it.

Ron Barshop:

So you are one of our first functional medicine physicians on the show. When I think of functional medicine or integrative medicine, I think of sort of whole body or whole person medicine. And you're not a condition, you're not a diabetic, you're a person with a disease and many other conditions. Can you separate for our listeners the difference between a functional medicine doc and the rest of the physicians?

Ashley Maltz:

Sure. So I get this question quite a lot, as you can imagine. So personally, I actually don't consider myself a functional medicine doctor because I did not do the certification through the Institute for Functional Medicine. That being said, I blend a lot of functional medicine into my practice and I've gone to tons of conferences and learned a lot. But, I am an integrative medicine physician by my own personal labeling and am board-certified in that as well.

Ashley Maltz:

So the difference to me... We've got a lot of different ways to practice medicine and ways that were not really common in the U.S. or not known about until more recently. So the way I see it, it's one umbrella; a big, huge umbrella and I see integrative medicine as the big umbrella. Within

it, you've got Chinese medicine, you've got Ayurveda, you've got Indian folk medicine, you've got Native American medicine.

Ashley Maltz:

You've got allopathic medicine, you've got really everything you could ever imagine. Integrative medicine takes the best from all of those that are evidence-based and non-harmful, and cost-effective, that's the point, and uses them as a blend in regular medical care. Functional medicine to me, and some might argue with this, is a subset of integrative medicine, or just in general, it's a different type of medicine. It's based out of naturopathic medicine, which was started in Bastyr University in Seattle. And it was kind of taken from there and taken out of just getting a naturopathic medicine degree. Now chiropractors can learn functional medicine, health coaches can learn functional medicine, allopathic MDs can learn it and build it into their practice. So it generally starts with the gut and root-cause disease, but so does integrative medicine. So they're similar. If you could do a Venn diagram, they all overlap. And yet they're all separate. It's really kind of interesting.

Ron Barshop:

So is your favorite kind of case to see is somebody that has a lot of complexity and nobody's been able to solve it before? You're like a crime scene investigator?

Ashley Maltz:

Sometimes. Yeah. I actually really like... There's some people who haven't seen every other dietary changer and they haven't tried a lot of things. Those are my favorite. I love to open people's eyes to things and just show how sometimes it can be really simple. Like just a simple change in your life can pay off in dividends. That to me is my favorite patient.

Ashley Maltz:

It's not necessarily... They've been to the Mayo Clinic and they've been... I see those people and God help them all. I mean, it's sucks to be sick and not know what's going on, but I also really like, "Okay, well, let's try this modification or let's get your thyroid medication optimized" or whatever it is. I really like that.

Ron Barshop:

I was sort of blessed at the beginning of this pandemic and my wife and I had a nice picnic. And I said, "Let's call somebody we really love and admire that made a big difference in our life and thank them." I called my favorite professor from college. He's still around and he's been all over Colorado Springs trying to figure out what's wrong with him. And when I said, "How are you doing after 40 years?" He says, "Not well-run." And he told me his symptoms.

Ron Barshop:

I'm not a doctor, I'm not a trained like you are. But he described basically adrenal fatigue, because my business partner's daughter had just had a pretty severe case. I said, "I have couple of functional medicine doctors from my show you can call, but try this thing at Whole Foods and see what happens."

Ron Barshop:

And he called me the next day and he says, "Ron, I was like, ready to give up," he goes, "I'm like vital and energetic in my eighties," and he goes, "and I had lost it all and it's back again. And thank you." So I think I know the feeling, what you're talking about, is just a simple supplement made a huge difference in his life.

Ashley Maltz:

Right? I love that. I mean, just think of vitamin D. I used to have so many patients who were in chronic pain and I was in Connecticut where it's dark, it's cold. So people aren't outside a lot and I remember their levels being so low and just supplementing with the adequate. And now that's vogue, that's the norm with a lot of doctors, but that was 10 years ago. And people weren't checking and replacing vitamin D as much. And it just makes such a difference.

Ron Barshop:

So Ashley, when someone is in their residency that might be listening now wants to get into an integrative medicine. What is your suggestion or advice to them?

Ashley Maltz:

I recommend either contacting me, I can give that information, or doing rotations with people in the community who practice integrative medicine or functional medicine. And then there are residencies that combine. They have a residency component that's integrative. So again, through the University of Arizona, thanks to the Andrew Weil School of Integrative Medicine, they build them into their residencies for family medicine, it has quite a few. There are some in pediatrics. I used to be on faculty at the University of New Mexico, which had the program in internal medicine. So it's growing. And I think psychiatry it's growing as well. So it's there. It's just a matter of finding what you want.

Ron Barshop:

Very good. Have people want to find you, how do they find you Ashley?

Ashley Maltz:

They can go to my website, ashleymaltzmd.com, or if they're local in Austin, West Holistic Medicine is where I practice. And I'm happy to talk with them or answer questions through email or phone.

Ron Barshop:

And if you could find a banner over America right now, what would your banner say?

Ashley Maltz:

Ooh, that's a tough one. It would have to be something really clever. So I have to think about that; stay calm and eat vegetables. There we go.

Ron Barshop:

Very good. Well, Ashley, thank you for being on the show and we appreciate learning all about what you're doing and how you work. And we'll talk to you again soon, I hope.

Ashley Maltz:

Yeah, thanks so much.

Ron Barshop:

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