

Mimi Guarneri, MD, FACC, ABIHM: Healing Through Science and Compassion

Interview by Craig Gustafson

Facilitated by the Inaugural Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine 2014 conference.

Mimi Guarneri, MD, FACC, ABIHM, will speak at the 2014 annual conference of the Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine (AIHM), which will be held October 26–30 in San Diego, California. Dr Guarneri is board-certified in cardiology, internal medicine, nuclear medicine, and is a diplomat of the American Board on Integrative Holistic Medicine. She was the founder of the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine and currently serves as founder and director of Guarneri Health in La Jolla, California. The center will be a national model for a multidisciplinary approach to health care.

Dr Guarneri's medical degree is from SUNY Medical Center in New York. She served her internship and residency at Cornell Medical Center, where she later became chief medical resident. She served cardiology fellowships at both New York University Medical Center and Scripps Clinic. She served as an attending physician in interventional cardiology at Scripps Clinic, where she placed thousands of coronary stents.

Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive and holistic approach to cardiovascular disease, she pioneered the Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine where she used state-of-the-art cardiac imaging technology and lifestyle change programs to aggressively diagnose, prevent, and treat cardiovascular disease.

Dr Guarneri participated as a member of the writing committee for the American College of Cardiology Foundation Complementary Medicine Expert Consensus Document. This expert consensus statement on integrating complementary medicine into cardiovascular medicine was published in 2005. She is the author of *The Heart Speaks*, a poignant collection of stories from heart patients who have benefited from integrative medicine approaches.

She was recognized in 2011 for her national leadership in integrative medicine by the Bravewell Collaborative with the Bravewell Leadership Award and now serves as chair of the

Bravewell Clinical Network for integrative medicine. In 2008, she was honored by Project Concern International for her work in southern India, and she currently serves on the international subcommittee for Direct Relief International. Dr Guarneri also served on an advisory panel for the Institute of Medicine to explore the science and practice of integrative medicine for promoting the nation's health. The summit's findings were released in 2009. She was elected president of the American Board of Integrative and Holistic Medicine and in 2012 received the Linus Pauling Functional Medicine Lifetime Achievement Award from the Institute for Functional Medicine. She is the founding president of the AIHM, which is becoming a global multidisciplinary member community for health professionals in integrative care.

Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal (IMCJ): Science and Connection is both the title of the 2014 Academy of Integrative Health & Medicine (AIHM) conference and the subject of your opening day message. What do these words represent in the context of integrative medical practice?

Dr Guarneri: My personal vision is healing people and changing lives through science and compassion. Our entire conference is focused on translating the science of health and healing into practice. Connection has a dual meaning: the importance of connection to self, family, community, and the planet, and connection to each other as health care providers. This year, a special level of connection will be experienced among an increasingly diverse array of clinicians representing various disciplines, including MDs, DOs, NDs, NPs, RNs, PAs, LAcS, DCs, PhDs, CNMs, and others. And yet another level of connection is occurring as we unite with the American Holistic Medical Association (AHMA) to develop the academy.

IMCJ: How do these concepts signify a transition point in approach for integrative practitioners?

Dr Guarneri: In the United States, we spend \$4.5 trillion but we manage to rank 37th in health outcomes in the world. In today's health care model, practitioners feel extraordinary pressure to reduce costs as we face skyrocketing incidences of chronic diseases. The solution seems obvious. First, take the principles of science, properly invest in research, and investigate evidence-based therapies. Next, apply the concept of connection. By taking a holistic, integrative approach, we see that everything is connected and that prevention is the most effective path to health. Prevention equals greater health and saves money; for every \$1 spent on prevention and wellness programs, \$5.22 is saved.

The fact that integrative medicine reduces both suffering and the cost of health care has swung the doors open as consumer demand and support from reimbursement agents increases. I think practitioners are just realizing that we're in a new era of health care. We are connecting the dots for our patients' well-being. And, at the academy, we are connecting across healing disciplines to enhance our effectiveness. We recognize that true healing requires a cohesive balance of body, mind, and spirit, and the wisdom of all global healing traditions. Collaboration and systemic thinking are at the heart of this model and will be key to transforming health.

IMCJ: How do you hope to help clinicians understand and embrace the tools and methodology that is now at their disposal?

Dr Guarneri: Health practitioners will receive an evidenced-based approach to the fundamental pillars of health, such as nutrition, fitness, and mind-body medicine. Practitioners will leave with pearls to apply immediately into clinical practice from health challenges ranging from diabetes to

depression. In addition, they will be exposed to the wisdom and teaching of the global healing traditions such as homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, and ayurveda.

IMCJ: How is AIHM evolving to keep up with the needs of integrative practitioners?

Dr Guarneri: AIHM is the trusted up-to-date educational resource for practitioners desiring to improve the health and well-being of their clients. Every year, our faculty, including luminaries like Jeffrey Bland, PhD, FACC, FACC; Mary Jo Kreitzer, PhD, RN, FAAN; Joe Pizzorno, ND; Jill



Stansbury, ND; and many others offer scholarly, clinically relevant, current content. The conference evolves to keep pace with the realities of practice and administration. For instance, one of our most popular lectures is about the legal aspects of running an integrative practice. This year, we are offering a special postconference certification program to health care administrators. The conference is celebrating its 15th year, but what makes the event special is the inauguration of the AIHM, which represents a major evolution.

“Collaboration and connection” serves as an unofficial theme of how we operate. The AIHM came together because we listened to integrative partners who shared a vision for a member-driven organization that educates, certifies, and empowers the community.

As we actualize our vision to transform the way we think about health and health care, we continue to listen and evolve. Typically, the conference is 85% to 90% MDs and DOs. As we become a global, interdisciplinary academy, we are actively reaching out to multiple disciplines with a goal of deep collaboration and integration. I truly believe that this union will usher in the next phase of growth.

IMCJ: How is current science changing the paradigm of health care and causing practitioners to refocus on wellness?

Dr Guarneri: We know the leading causes of death are preventable if we focus on lifestyle and environment. Everyday research points out the role of nutrition, planetary health, and mind-body medicine on the impact of disease. The current US health care system spends more on disease care than any other developed country, yet our outcomes are worse. Health is an economic strategy. Focusing on health is good for people and the planet.

IMCJ: How does the concept of optimal health and function impact care in new models of practice?

Dr Guarneri: Integrative healing draws from a vast array of traditions. How will the “New Era” bring these together into a cohesive new model for healing? All the global healing traditions offer us opportunities to bring our clients more options for health and healing. AIHM training and education prepares health providers to offer their clients the best that health and medicine has to offer.

IMCJ: Overall, what will attendees take away from their experience at the conference?

Dr Guarneri: My hope is that our colleagues will find that the academy is their new home for like-minded individuals committed to treating the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—by utilizing the best of all healing traditions. I hope our colleagues find a reawakened passion for the practice of health and medicine. I am certain that they will leave feeling empowered with a new set of tools and a sense of community among other committed professionals as we pursue the transformation of health care together.

Learn more about the conference at
<http://www.abihm.org/physicians/annual-conference/>.
