



Barnard Medical Center, Where Medicine Meets Nutrition

By
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The Barnard Medical Center, which opened today in Washington, D.C., combines top-of-the-line medical care with nutrition education and preventative medicine.

We recently spoke to the founder of the center, Dr. Neal Barnard, who is also the president and founder of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). He is changing health care as we know it: “We work with our patients to tackle the root causes of an illness, rather than just treat the symptoms. So when nutrition is a core issue—as it often is in diabetes, heart disease, and overweight or obesity—we emphasize the power of improved nutrition. We also prescribe medications to the extent that patients really need them.”

The vast majority[i] of doctor’s visits in this country do not include any counseling on diet or nutrition, even though most experts believe that nutrition plays a key role in health outcomes.

Personalized Health Plans and Long-Term Support

Part of the medical center’s approach is the integration of individual attention with long-term and group support. Barnard says, “We help our patients every step of the way, creating personalized health care plans, providing individual and group sessions with our clinicians, and offering ongoing support. We’ll also provide classes where patients will receive nutrition education, cooking instruction, grocery store tours, and emotional support.”

The medical team consists of doctors, nurse practitioners, and registered dietitians. Nutrition and lifestyle changes will be the foundation rather than the afterthought, and Dr. Barnard spent the last two years recruiting for the talented people necessary to do this groundbreaking work. The medical director, James Loomis, M.D., previously worked as director of prevention and wellness at St. Luke’s Hospital in St. Louis, team internist for the St. Louis Rams football team and the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team, and tour physician for the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. In his own life, Dr. Loomis overhauled his own diet and saw firsthand the power of plant-based nutrition.

Dr. Barnard has been a pioneer in the field of preventative medicine and research for decades and has led numerous studies, including the groundbreaking 2009 study on diet and type 2 diabetes funded by the National Institutes of Health. Over the years, as his methods and success has become well known, he’s heard from both patients and doctors who want to know and learn more.

“I hear from people every day who are looking for a doctor who really knows nutrition and understands their dietary choices. And I hear from doctors who believe in the power of plant-based nutrition and preventive medicine but who have no support or no time to integrate it into their practices. I hear from students who are disappointed that their medical schools offer no opportunities to learn about nutrition. And day after day, I hear from people who are suffering from diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and weight problems who have been prescribed medication after medication without ever having the opportunity to tackle the root cause of their problems. We’ve opened Barnard Medical Center for all of these people—patients, health care providers, and students—to thrive.”

According to Dr. Barnard, the new Barnard Medical Center expects to see about 600 patients a month and 5,000 patients in 2016. It is also a teaching facility for medical students from the George Washington University, and a place where research studies can test new nutrition interventions. Barnard Medical is not for profit, accepts major insurance plans, and has a sliding scale for low-income patients.

Barnard Medical Center
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[i] According to table 19 on page 22 of the [National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey: 2010 Summary Tables](#), a mere 13.1% of U.S. patients received diet and nutrition health education services as part of their physician office visits that year.