

In a very real sense, Dr. Mona Gupta, a leading psychiatrist in Raleigh, is a talented, professional gardener.

"It's true," she says with a smile, "that I spend a good deal of time with my patients 'tilling the soil,' you might say, to guide them on a path of health and balance. The variety in this work is amazing.

"Recently a very trim gentleman came to see me in a fretful state. He told me he urgently needed to lose 10 pounds, for the sake of his health and appearance. Actually, he's very thin.

"Why do you need to lose 10 pounds?" I asked. 'Because,' he said, 'in the past, not so long ago, I was seriously overweight. I can't let that happen to me again.'

"I told him he had a fat brain. He's fixating on the dire consequences of obesity, even though he's thin. And I offered him honest and consoling comments, noting that he has valiantly fought the battle of the bulge for years, with great success. He now feels good and looks good. He just needs to keep right on doing what he's now doing so successfully.

"And he responded, 'I needed to hear that.'

"It's true, people need to hear that they are on a sound and healthy path, and that their life is purposeful and in balance. I give them that support whenever I can do so honestly.

POWER OF BELIEFS

"And of course, underneath this gentleman's comments about his weight are powerful beliefs—perhaps out of his conscious awareness—that have been part of his life experience quite possibly since childhood. In time, our work will be to uncover and understand those beliefs in a way that will solidify the changes this gentleman has made, and is continuing to make, in his pursuit of health and balance.

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Recently, Dr. Mona Gupta, center, and her friends completed a mini-marathon (7.5 miles) in Florida.

Dr. Gupta felt destined at an early age to be in the healing arts.

She went to Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine, in Florida, emerging as an osteopathic physician "with holistic interests and tendencies. The term osteopathic physician is still an unknown to many of my patients. I explain that osteopaths attend four years of medical school training just like medical doctors, and are 'real, licensed' doctors in all the states and dozens of foreign countries, both for medicine and surgery.

"And it's true that osteopaths emphasize the importance of the musculoskeletal system, holistic medicine, proper nutrition, and environmental factors in maintaining good health. Osteopaths are known for using a hands-on approach to medicine and frequently manipulate or palpate as part of diagnosis and treatment."

After her Nova training, Dr. Gupta completed her four-year residency in psychiatry at the Baptist Medical Center at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC.

Dr. Gupta has an eclectic practice, working with adolescents and adults no matter the nature of their health issues. "I work with such challenging problems as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia as well as with scores of people who are simply challenged by events in their lives. I really do empathize with patients who are dealing with such every-day issues as anxiety, questions of self-image, depression and perhaps health challenges. Every one of us has a period in our lives when we are challenged and need support and guidance."

Dr. Gupta has a network of counselors and psychotherapists who are well-qualified to work with clients who need on-going support. "I do 'talk therapy' when it is appropriate, but I am a medical doctor and when we are dealing principally with behavioral or psychological issues, such as a history of trauma, I might refer the patient to a psychologist for longer-term therapy. I work with professionals who are very adept with PTSD patients, for example, and others who are excellent marriage counselors and therapists. It's quite remarkable how often a rocky marriage is the root cause of depression and anxiety." h&h

The Garden *of the Psyche*

"I spend a good deal of time with my patients 'tilling the soil,' you might say, to guide them on a path of health and balance."

"That is a simple formula that, with variations, applies to almost every patient I see: the patient considered to be dealing with a borderline personality disorder who is driven to cut herself, for example. What are the driving beliefs about self-image and self-worth supporting that behavior? This is the patient who is also likely to have a problem with heavy alcohol abuse and who is in and out of painful, destructive relationships.

"My sense is that these patients, in some cases, are addicted to pain and it's our work together to 'till the soil,' as I said, and find and identify past events and relationships that explain this behavior. Most often the use of alcohol serves to blunt feelings. A person may feel anxious and depressed when they're sober, and they use alcohol to numb those feelings.

"So I spend a lot of time with patients dealing with these challenging issues, including their normal feelings of sadness, and help them understand that they don't need a drink or a pill or a bottle of wine because they're feeling a little anxious on a given day. I remind them of an important truth: they need to feel. Some people use food to numb their feelings, and that leads to obesity. Some people smoke because they're anxious. My sense is that this addictive behavior serves the purpose of covering up and suppressing events, ideas, and beliefs that are challenging to confront. But confronting them and putting them aside is our work together."

HEALING PATH

The daughter of two physicians—her father is a gastroenterologist, her mother a psychiatrist, both still practicing in Florida—