

Family Wellness Clinics: *The Norm Is Constant Learning*



Dr. Vaidya-Tank, left, welcomes Lea Lott, a Physician's Assistant, to the Family Wellness Clinics team.

For Dr. Bhavna Vaidya-Tank, the educational path leading her to medical school was seemingly set in stone from birth.

"I was interested in being a fashion designer," she recalls, smiling. "When I mentioned this to my mother, she sweetly and firmly told me I could absolutely do that as a hobby, but that I was going to medical school. A physician was all I was going to be, without question." And with eight consecutive generations of medical doctors in her family, it was hard to argue. "My grandfather was still a practicing physician well into his nineties," she notes. "My dad: a surgeon; my mom: an ophthalmologist. I have two sisters and both are physicians, one in London, the other in Washington, DC. If you include uncles and aunts, there are seven of us right now who are practicing medicine."

Even Dr. Vaidya-Tank's maiden name—Vaidya—means physician, or more specifically, "one who knows," in Sanskrit. So—as her mother knew she would—Dr. Vaidya-Tank began her medical training at Kasturba Medical College in India, where she received a full academic scholarship. She graduated with honors before completing her residency at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center—where she earned the Patient Advocate and Patient Care Award for engendering a focus on wellness that

included functional medicine treatments for pain management and lifestyle and behavioral modifications such as smoking cessation and weight loss programs.

CONSTANT LEARNING

Medical school, however, was by no means where Dr. Tank's medical training was to end. "Medicine is a constant learning process," she says definitively. "One can never know everything, in no small part because it is a science that is always evolving. So, the knowledge I hold today is just a drop in the bucket of what I will need to know over the lifetime of my career."

Adding to the need for continuous education is Dr. Vaidya-Tank's passion for providing health care that extends far beyond the confines of traditional medicine. "I began my practice with an idealistic attitude about the kind of care I was going to be able to provide for my patients," she says. "What I quickly realized was how truly limiting conventional medicine can sometimes be. Not that it isn't a strong part of what makes up competent care, but that it is really just that; a *part* of that care.

"I have found that an integrative approach to medicine is what serves my patients best because it takes into account the whole picture of health, addressing health care needs from physical to mental to psychosocial to emotional. Acupuncture, for example, was an interest of mine when I was still in medical school. As it wasn't an offering in my formal training, I took courses through UCLA and got certified while still in school. I was able to open an acupuncture clinic in my residency.

"Now, while it isn't something I currently have the time to offer in my practice, it is something I know well and am able to speak with patients about. What this knowledge does is enable me to provide my care alongside the care of an acupuncturist understanding fully how these two approaches may synergistically help a mutual patient.

"Genetic testing is another strong interest of mine," she continues. "There are many applications today, but I was originally interested about 18 years ago in genetic testing

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for heart disease. As an Asian-Indian, I grew up very aware of the disproportionately high incidence of

heart disease among Asian-Indian men. Men in their 40s with decent cholesterol will just drop dead from heart attack with no warning. So, I completed an internship with Berkeley Heart Lab. Now, genetic testing for a number of different things is an integral part of my daily practice."

Some of these genetic tools include DNA testing for weight issues, genetic testing for medication metabolism, and skin fit testing to understand how skin ages and to identify skin conditions to which one may be predisposed.

TRAINING IN THE OFFICE

Dr. Vaidya-Tank's knowledge of complementary medicine has expanded over the years to include a wide array of knowledge, tools, and services. As her staff expands to accommodate her growing patient population and a second office location, on-going training and education are a large part of the work culture she has created at Family Wellness Clinics—in her original office in Clayton, and in her relatively new Family Wellness Clinic and Regenesi MD in Raleigh.

This culture of continual learning and integrated medicine attracted Lea Lott to Dr. Vaidya-Tank's practice. Ms. Lott, a physician's assistant (PA) and the newest member of the Family Wellness Clinics team, says she was looking for a place of employment to help her reach beyond her training in traditional medicine. "I hope to take what I know and integrate the things Dr. Vaidya-Tank can teach me in order to provide a very high standard of care to patients I care for," she says.

And to be certain, Dr. Vaidya-Tank has much to teach. "Every new member of our team goes through the American Academy of Anti-Aging program," she explains. "We also all attend the organization's annual conference and participate in ongoing in-office training throughout the year. Other classes I bring in cover bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, webinars through the Boston Heart Lab on advance lipid testing, as well as training sessions on fillers and laser skin treatments. Our professional training covers this broad range of topics because one of the things my staff and I place a high value on is a concept of complete health, inside and out. From endocrine disorders

to hormonal imbalances to skin care and aesthetics—these are all an important part of helping our patients to achieve wellness and happiness; this is comprehensive health care to achieve comprehensive health.

"There is constant teaching here," she observes. "Our learning process is not something that happens once a year. It's an ongoing process requiring full engagement on a daily basis. That's what it takes, in my opinion, to be a good health care provider."

ON THE HORIZON

"There are so many things I still want to learn," notes Dr. Vaidya-Tank. "Really, it's endless. Change is constant in medicine—in what we know, and how we practice. There are always new and interesting things I would love to know about and be able to offer our patients.

"One new thing we will be doing soon is CBD oil. It's pretty incredible stuff and can be used to help treat a whole host of things including pain and inflammation.

"At times," she says, "I'm overwhelmed with how much I need to know. There's just so much. As a provider, the most important thing is to keep learning and to know my limitations. I can't know everything, but I can know what I'm good at and how to help my patients find expert resources in addition to my own when needed." 

PATIENT-CENTERED MEDICAL HOME

Dr. Vaidya-Tank is understandably pleased and proud that her practice continues to receive annual designation, after rigorous review, as a Patient-Centered Medical Home, a federal program designed to strengthen the delivery of primary care services.

The federal guidelines note that: *The medical home is best described as a model or philosophy of primary care that is patient-centered, comprehensive, team-based, coordinated, accessible, and focused on quality and safety.*

In 2007, the major primary care physician associations developed and endorsed the Joint Principles of the Patient-Centered Medical Home. The model has since evolved, and today the PCPC actively promotes the medical home as defined by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

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