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Dr. Gupta

Training in Health Care

From the Age of Six

Dr. Mona Gupta, a pre-eminent Raleigh psychiatrist who also maintains an office in Apex, has engaged in intensive health care training since the age of six.

“Obviously I didn’t know I would become a doctor at that early age,” she says. “We lived in Florida, and my mother and father are both doctors, and both are still practicing. My father, Dr. Rajendra Gupta, is a gastroenterologist, and my mother, Dr. Shobha Gupta, is a psychiatrist.

“In a sense, I began ‘making rounds’ very early in life. On the weekends, especially, when I was not in school, I would often make hospital rounds, separately, with both parents. At times I would go off with my father, if a babysitter wasn’t available, to an emergency in the hospital. I might, for example, be on hand to watch him do surgical procedures—which, in fact, was a normal part of my life at that time.

“Later in life, I’ve been told more details about this early exposure. If I was on hand at the hospital with my Dad, when he was perhaps performing a colonoscopy, I’m told I would come home and ‘perform’ the same procedure on one of my dolls.

“And then on many other occasions I would make rounds with my mother in the hospital setting, and often I would sit in the nursing station, drawing or reading and whatever else six-year-olds do. Often—and I remember it well—a psychotic patient might come to the window to let us know that ‘The Russians are coming! Get in a safe place!’ And I really thought the Russians were coming, so I hid under the desk. And then my mother would come along and say, off-handedly, ‘Oh that patient is paranoid. Don’t worry—the Russians really aren’t coming. You’re as safe as you can be!’”

CHOOSING HER PATH: OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

Dr. Gupta seasoned her understandable pull into medicine by attending Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine, in Florida, emerging as an osteopathic physician “with holistic interests and tendencies. It’s true,” she notes, “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.

THE CALL OF PSYCHIATRY

When she began her medical studies, Dr. Gupta was still unsure of her specialty path. “I did all the rotations, including internal medicine and pediatrics, and I loved them all. And then I did my psychiatry rotation at a state hospital in South Florida. As a child, I had spent many hours sitting at nursing stations, waiting for my mother and talking with patients, so I felt completely comfortable in this setting. I had a real and natural connection to the patients.

“That was not true for the other students, who to a person were uncomfortable and uneasy in that setting. I felt just the opposite. I had empathy for the patients and realized working with them is what I was called to do. And I’ve never had a moment of regret with that decision.”

A VARIED PRACTICE

Dr. Gupta has an eclectic practice. “I love 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 serious health issues. Every one of us has a period in our lives when we are challenged and need support and guidance.”

Dr. Gupta has developed a small corps 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.”

MIND-BODY WORK

True to her early exposure from her mother and father, Dr. Gupta attracts many patients who have issues and problems that include both mind and body concerns. “Clearly your mind is connected to your body,” she says, “and if you have muscle tension, it may well be the cause of high levels of anxiety. If we release and ease the anxiety, the muscles will release, as well.”

A recent patient offers a striking example of the mind-body connection, tapping into the doctor’s interests and training both in gastroenterology and psychiatry.

“A woman in her late 20s came to me suffering with severe GI disturbances, including diarrhea, indigestion, burning sensations, and bloating. She had seen several gastroenterologists, had an endoscopy exam, a colonoscopy, and other very thorough workups. The findings were all negative. The tests indicated that her GI system was in perfect working order. She was told she had irritable bowel syndrome, and there wasn’t much that could be done for it.

“She came to see me out of frustration and feelings of depression. I was interested in what was going on in her body, of course, but what I really wanted to find out was what was going on in her life. She had a baby, and clearly, it seemed certain, there were hormonal issues. She wasn’t sleeping well, and there were other factors.

“It also became clear that her poor sleep pattern was related principally to child care, an issue that needed to be addressed. Having the child had caused major changes in her life, and she was clearly still adjusting to the demands of being a mother.

“I did give her mild medications to help with her sleep, and I remembered what I learned a long time ago from a family friend, also a gastroenterologist. He told me that the gut is lined with serotonin receptors, which establishes the link between the gut and depression and anxiety. Serotonin plays a role in mood, anger, aggression, body temperature, sleep and metabolism.”

POSITIVE RESPONSE

“In this case, this patient’s physical problems responded positively to medical treatment of her anxiety and depression. And as her sleep improved, her symptoms abated.

“Probably the most common lack of understanding that I find in my patients is about the importance of restorative sleep. People tend to underestimate just how important an appropriate amount of good quality sleep is to the entire physical, emotional, and mental system. Without good quality sleep, the body simply cannot rejuvenate itself and bring good energy to a new day.

“My patient with the baby got some help with house chores and child care and is now doing much better. Depression and anxiety have eased considerably; her GI system is working just fine; and she is sleeping restfully through the night.”

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