



Hospital Column for May 19, 2010

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Local physician practices what he preaches

Local internist Dr. Tom Craig is an intelligent, well-read and likeable physician who practices what he preaches. He eats sensibly, exercises daily, and knows his numbers. It didn't take him 29 years of medical practice to recognize that if Americans don't change their life styles to eat less, exercise more, manage their diseases with regular doctor's visits, and know their numbers, they will be in a world of hurt.

In his Junction City internal medicine practice, nearly all of Dr. Craig's patients have serious diseases or they wouldn't be going to him in the first place. "Most of my patients have or are presenting signs of the new hot topic- metabolic syndrome," he said. "Metabolic syndrome is the group of risk factors that occur together, usually related to obesity, which increase the risk for heart disease, stroke and Type 2 Diabetes." It is usually brought on by excessive weight around the middle and includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol and insulin resistance.

"The risk of metabolic syndrome goes way up with being overweight," Dr. Craig said. Lifestyle changes are the best prevention of metabolic syndrome. For most Americans, that means losing weight and lowering one's body mass index to 28 or less. Eating healthy food instead of so much fast or processed food and eating fewer calories than one burns is another, he added.

Dr. Craig would be happy if his patients exercised 30 minutes a day, five times a week. He serves as an example by riding his bicycle (20 miles is a short trip for him), walking his dog, or whatever keeps him active. "I try to get people to do what they can within their natural environment," he said. "For example, parking farthest away from the door at Wal-Mart, taking the stairs at work, or joining another for a short walk after lunch are all helpful. We now know that exercising three times a day for 10 minutes does just as much good as one 30-minute session." To illustrate his point, he now parks in the employee parking lot at the hospital, which is farther from his office than his reserved parking place.

On the plus side, Dr. Craig is confident that today's medical care, pharmaceuticals and technology are the best they've ever been, even though they come with a hefty price tag and often hard to pay for. Patients generally live longer despite all the damage they do to themselves with poor diet and inactive lifestyles. "I can prescribe medication to manage diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and more, but modifying lifestyle choices is the better alternative," he said. "We cannot cure these ailments, just manage them as best we can until the patients come back with something else."

Everyone should know his or her health numbers, including waist measurement, body mass index, blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and any other screening numbers one's doctor believes important to one's health and well-being.

With American's in a health and obesity crisis, it's more important than ever that every adult have a primary care provider (internist, family medicine, nurse practitioner or physician assistant) that can provide consistent, routine medical care-- someone who knows his or her patients and who doesn't have to start over with every appointment. Without this consistency and intimate knowledge between patient and provider, patients will undoubtedly incur unnecessary time and expense as the new provider "catches up" in an attempt to assess the patient's health issues with each office or emergency room visit.

Dr. Craig has remained loyal to his patients and they to him for 29 years. He serves as a prime example of how to best lead a healthy, happy life.