

# The Rise of Functional Medicine

By DR. TOM FLASS AND BRITTANY COBURN NP-C  
Photos by DIANNE DOTTER AT DIANNE@DOLLIPHOTO.COM

**“Doctor my eyes have seen the years, and the slow parade of fears without crying, now I want to understand...”**

The lyrics to a favorite Jackson Browne song resonate with many of us “older folks” but may hold special meaning for healthcare providers and patients navigating the murky waters of our medical system. Healthcare in the United States is going through a period of rough transition, leaving many patients and their providers frustrated and confused. We spend twice as much on healthcare in the US compared to any other developed nation yet have worse outcomes in many areas. 95% of those U.S. healthcare dollars are spent on costly surgery, drugs, and hospitalization while only 5% or less is spent on prevention. The world's leading medical journals, JAMA and The Lancet both recently reported that most illness and death affecting Americans are diet and lifestyle related. Yet somehow only 1/3 of medical schools offer minimal training in nutrition, and extraordinarily little in lifestyle modification.

Medical providers in our current system are increasingly getting squeezed to see more and more patients in shorter office visits, not allowing them to offer the type of care that both deserve. Preventive personalized medicine gives way to turnstile prescription factory care resulting in sky-high rates of burnout in medicine. The health care consumer is also getting squeezed, with steadily rising insurance premiums, sky high deductibles, and insurance companies declining coverage for sometimes well-established medical testing and conditions. Small wonder that so many people are upset and want something different. By all measures, the current model is unsustainable.

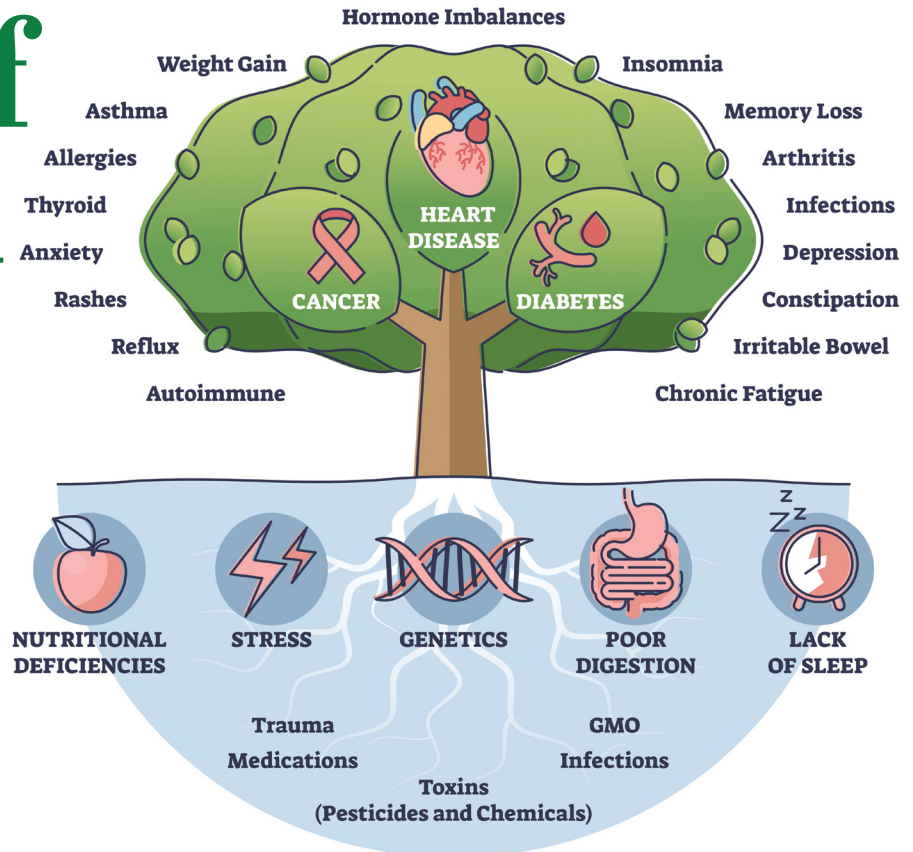
## We all deserve better.

The good news? As with all crises we have faced as a nation, innovators and out of the box thinkers start to shake things up and offer new paths forward. Alternative solutions that start as small grassroots operations hit a point of groundswell as new ideas catch on. Enter the rise of Functional Medicine.

## What is functional medicine and how is it different?

The current medical model mostly treats the *symptoms and effects* of harmful diet, lifestyle, & toxic exposures rather than addressing the *root causes* of disease and ill health. We refer to this as “downstream” medicine as opposed to “upstream” medicine. Patients get caught in a kind of hamster wheel, always chasing symptoms but never fixing the issues at the core of their problems. Functional medicine is a very different approach, and can be best described as *science-based, personalized, root-cause (upstream) medicine*. Time to get off the hamster wheel folks.

Increasing numbers of people across Montana and the rest of the country are discovering the benefits of Functional Medicine. The world-renowned Cleveland Clinic opened a Center for Functional Medicine almost a decade ago, with wild popularity. Traditional healthcare providers are starting to pursue training in this field, often as much for what it can offer them in their own health challenges as what it can offer their patients. We at Functional Medicine Associates are no exception, and credit Functional Medicine for our own heal-



ing and health care “awakening.” It was effective where conventional medicine was not, and to us, it just made sense. Identify and treat the root causes of disease and poor health before they have a chance to do any more damage and take actions to restore the person to a state of health. While Functional Medicine is by no means the only type of care that embodies these principles, we feel that it does the best job of integrating “holistic” medicine with modern medicine and science.

**Science-based:** Functional Medicine continually uses the latest research to inform the practice of cutting-edge medicine that stays ahead of the mainstream. It is a commonly accepted fact that medical discoveries take 20-30 years to evolve from groundbreaking research to “standard of care” medical practice. Given the health of many Americans, we do not have 20-30 years to wait. Your health and the health of your family matter now, so why aren't we incorporating more of these concepts into the practice of medicine?

This recalls a quote by the philosopher Schopenhauer: “All truth passes through three stages- First it is ridiculed, then it is violently protested, then it is eventually accepted as self-evident.” With medicine, which changes very slowly, we are somewhere in the first and second phases, but being dragged toward the last stage kicking and screaming.

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A few examples of Functional Medicine being light years ahead of the curve include the importance of our gut bacteria (the microbiome) and “leaky gut” which is the all-too-common state of increased permeability of our intestinal barrier. Both concepts have been self-evident and a cornerstone of Functional Medicine for decades and have an enormous impact on our health but were mostly ignored or ridiculed by the mainstream until recently.

*Good medicine is personalized medicine.* True patient-centered healthcare such as Functional Medicine recognizes and embraces the individual and discards the “one size fits all” approach. Each patient has their own unique background which is a combination of their genetics and their exposures through diet and lifestyle which profoundly impact their health. We believe that there are six fundamental “Pillars of Health” that need to be evaluated and sometimes adjusted for an individual to be truly healthy. These six pillars are the root cause of health or disease. We will explore each of these in more detail in future editions of this magazine:

1. Nutrition
2. Sleep
3. Exercise and physical activity
4. Stress reduction and mental health
5. Connectedness and community
6. Exposure to sunlight, nature and a clean environment

A good medical provider is a detective, working with the patient using a detailed “six pillars” history as well as physical exam and targeted laboratory testing to uncover the upstream causes and triggers of the individual patient’s disease and ill health. Armed with this information, the provider can advise the patient on incorporating dietary & lifestyle changes, nutritional supplements, and judicious use of medications to restore health. This is what we all deserve from healthcare, and what we believe is the future of medicine.

For more information about Functional Medicine or to find a Functional Medicine provider near you, go to [www.IFM.org](http://www.IFM.org).

Dr Flass and Brittany Coburn NP-C can be found at [www.functionalmedassociates.com](http://www.functionalmedassociates.com)



## Personalized Root-Cause Science-Based Healthcare



Tom Flass MD

Brittany Coburn NP-C

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Chronic bloating



195 Commons Loop Suite D  
Kalispell, MT 59901

(406) 501-6570



[www.functionalmedassociates.com](http://www.functionalmedassociates.com)

We are licensed and board certified medical providers, trained and educated in Functional Medicine. We use a blend of standard and integrative medicine to diagnose and treat the patient and restore health. We recognize the individual and do not believe in one-size-fits-all medicine.