

EoMedigram

EoMed, LLC

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“Evolutionize Your Health!”

Notes on the evolution of health care in Northeast Wisconsin. September 2014

Welcome to the first EoMedigram, a newsletter for patients and friends of EoMed. We will cover topics of interest from breakthroughs in medical science and healthcare policy changes to what’s happening with individuals in and around Green Bay.

This newsletter is one of many firsts for EoMed this summer. As July ended, so ended my 20 years employment with Bellin. EoMed has grown steadily since its launch in 2005, and thanks to tremendous patient support, became large and strong enough to go it alone. To help me run things I hired an experienced clinic manager, Paula Kaminski. Kathy McKenzie, my friend and assistant for thirteen years, moved on to the Bellin College of Nursing. So Paula gamely agreed to handle the front desk along with her management duties. Nurse Amy continues to provide expert nursing care while rapidly gaining experience and confidence en route to her nurse practitioner degree.

Nurse Amy, Paula and I are working through this transition phase so that we can provide the highest quality, personalized medical care with greater efficiency, convenience and variety despite the challenges of a rapidly changing, often chaotic healthcare environment. As always, the driving force of our success is healthy patient-doctor relationships. That spirit of cooperation extends beyond medical care into all aspects of EoMed, including this newsletter. Since we are partners in health, EoMed belongs to all of us. We depend upon your input, feedback and ideas, so keep them coming!

Vitamin D on the Brain

For the last eight years, I’ve been pretty aggressive in recommending hefty vitamin D supplements for my patients. We’ve known for generations how important vitamin D is for strong bones, but research in the last decade reveals potential for much more widespread benefits. Various studies have linked higher vitamin D levels with reduced risk of multiple sclerosis, tuberculosis, seasonal depression, and even colon and other cancers.

With so many possible advantages, why shouldn't everybody take tons of vitamin D? It's not expensive, but there are other potential costs. You see, vitamins D, A, K and E are fat soluble, rather than water soluble like vitamins C and others. If you take too much of a water soluble nutrient, your kidneys filter it into the urine and you're easily rid of it. But fat soluble substances can build up in your cells, sometimes to toxic levels. So expert panels and health organizations always use caution when recommending the proper dose of vitamin D. They don't want millions of Americans getting vitamin D toxicity.

So when I say I've been aggressive recommending vitamin D, what exactly does that mean? Am I putting my patients at risk?

My standard advice is 2000 units once or twice daily, or 5000 units once daily. I felt comfortable with this range since reading a study a few years ago showing no evidence of ill effects in subjects taking 5000 units twice daily. I figure 50% or less of that 10,000 unit daily dose provides a sufficient safety margin. But the most recent, large expert panel issued their recommendation of just 1000 units / day despite acknowledging the accumulating evidence supporting higher levels. Their safety margin – just 10% of the daily dose shown safe in the earlier study – strikes me as overly cautious.

Whenever possible, doctors should inform patients of the facts and help them to decide for themselves. Last month some new facts emerged that might persuade you to jack up your vitamin D dose.

In the August American Academy of Neurology journal, researchers reported their large study showing a correlation between higher serum levels of vitamin D and lower risk of dementia. Following over 1600 subjects averaging about 73 years old for over five years, they sorted them into three groups: severely low, low, and normal vitamin D levels. Those with severely low vitamin D had about 2.2 times the risk of dementia as the normal group, and the low group had about 1.5 times the risk of normals. They also measured the chance of Alzheimer dementia versus dementia of all causes, and the risk ratios were about the same.

Few diseases generate more preventive incentive than dementia, and with good reason. But just in case some of my patients have doubts about D, I'm making it easier to get started. I contacted Mark Skogen of Festival Foods. Mark is always interested in ways to help his customers make healthy choices. He graciously donated bottles of vitamin D to make it easier for my patients to hop on the D train. Thanks, Mark and Festival Foods!

And thanks to not one but two of my patients for calling my attention to this study in last month's Neurology journal! To me, that is the best sign of a healthy patient-doctor relationship. The modern medical science knowledge base vastly exceeds the capacity of any one brain. If patients want to get the most out of modern medicine, they must take some of the responsibility for learning about it. I love it when patients come to me with medical articles and questions. It's interesting, and it's fun to see their passion and commitment to health. But it also shows their understanding of the patient-doctor partnership evolving with medical science, and that's the best way to get the most health out of health care.