

Developing Healing Relationships: Foreword from the Organizers

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This 3rd American Samuelli Symposium entitled “Developing Healing Relationships” was held on April 21–22, 2005, in Alexandria, Virginia.

The symposium was designed to complement the two previous American Samuelli Symposia, both of which explored the subject of optimal healing environments. The 1st symposium, “Definitions and Standards in Healing Research,” was held in January 2003. The content of that meeting focused on the variety of frameworks in which healing occurs and on approaches to the investigation of the internal environment of the patient and practitioner. The papers from this symposium were published as a supplement to the peer-reviewed journal *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* in May 2003.

The 25 papers of the 2nd symposium, “Toward Optimal Healing Environments in Health Care,” were published as a supplement to the peer-reviewed *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* in October 2004. This meeting explored the core domains of an Optimal Healing Environment (OHE) and provided recommendations for performing research in the inpatient, outpatient, and worksite venues. These papers are accessible on the Samuelli Institute website, www.siiib.org.

The primary mission of the Samuelli Institute is to support clinical and basic research in the science of healing. A primary goal of this research is to examine how relationships in health care either do or do not facilitate healing and self-recovery processes and to identify methods to extend that information to clinical and treatment settings. Accordingly, we fund collaborative research efforts that are oriented to the development, implementation, and evaluation of optimal healing environments and the relationship to these environments to the health care team members, the patients they serve, the patients’ significant others, and the community.

To further define our research agenda, we invited colleagues who have been thoughtful contributors to this field to prepare papers related to OHE. As a result of their ef-

forts, we have created the graphic on the back cover of this supplement. It highlights individual elements that combine to define an optimal healing environment.

The graphic illustrates what we feel are the core domains of an optimal healing environment. They involve activities that do the following:

1. develop an understanding of how healing happens, an awareness that change is possible, an expectation for change, and hope in a better future;
2. produce an experience of wholeness and integration of mind/body/spirit;
3. cultivate healing relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and practitioners to enhance caring, compassion, and social support;
4. teach how to engage in healthy lifestyles, including proper exercise, diet, relaxation, and creative outlets;
5. combine conventional and complementary care to produce collaborative medicine for the appropriate application treatments.

Ideally, the above activities occur in a supportive environment. The physical healing space includes nature, lighting, air, aesthetics, architecture, and fine art that support and stimulate recovery and repair. The organizational environment allows healing to emerge as a function of the venue’s leadership, mission, culture, teamwork, and service.

This 3rd Symposium on Optimal Healing Environments focused on healing relationships, the third vertical in the graphic. Relationships and the communication associated with them are the key to the delivery of caring and healing. Trust, honesty, and compassion form the primary components of healing relationships. Their delivery in the therapeutic alliance requires skills in communication.

Health care teams must have the capacity to communicate effectively and efficiently to deliver safe and coordinated care; staff and administration must communicate in a similar fashion to assure efficient operations; and patients

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and practitioners must communicate for treatment to be properly implemented. These skills can be modeled and learned.

This supplement examines elements of healing relationships and how they contribute or detract from healing environments. We hope you enjoy reading these papers.

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