

WELLNESS

HEALTHY BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT

Sunrise Foundation Presents "Journeys to Wellness" Program

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For the past six years, the nonprofit Sunrise Foundation has presented a daylong program that encourages participants to consider the meaning of wellness and the variety of paths to reach that destination. This year, participants gathered at The Community Church of Honolulu in Nu'uano on a picture-perfect Saturday morning in October to hear keynote speaker John Houk, M.D., talk about the ways in which people age in society and the challenges and opportunities they often encounter.

Houk, a primary care physician for 37 years whose patients are mainly older adults, used two fictional patient examples — "Bill" and "Iris" — to demonstrate how two individuals can age very differently, often influenced by their lifestyle choices.

In this case, "Bill," an obese Caucasian man who smoked cigarettes and drank two cola beverages a day for much of his adult life, ended up developing a number of chronic diseases that eventually resulted in his taking 12 different medications and eight nutritional supplements. Because of his complex medical profile, he also saw six different physicians. Bill was a "meat and potatoes" kind of guy who was not fond of vegetables. His medical problems included high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and an irregular heartbeat. He was single and cared for his mother until her death. However, their failure to discuss in specific terms her preferences in the event of her incapacitation resulted in medical interventions toward the end of her life that only prolonged her suffering.

The other patient in this scenario, "Iris," was of Okinawan ancestry. She was born into a family that ate a lot of vegetables — sometimes flavored with small amounts of meat or fish — and was involved in community activities. Iris was engaged with her family and neighborhood, practiced meditation for stress reduction and thoughtfully prepared for her future care needs. She loved living in her own home, but at some point decided it was time to move into a continuing care retirement community where her evolving care needs could be met with the appropriate level of services and supports. Although Iris experienced some health problems that many older people commonly experience as they age, she was in relatively good health compared to Bill.

While "Iris" and "Bill" are fictional patients, they are based on the life experiences and choices of real people that Dr. Houk has come to know in his long career as a primary care physician. Early in her life, Iris adopted a lifestyle that promoted healthy aging outcomes. She also made good choices along her life's journey and planned for the future. Fortunately, Bill recognized that he needed to make some changes in his life if he hoped to improve the status of his health. When he decided to see a new primary care physician and was asked about his health goals, Bill said he would like to reduce the number of medications he was taking and see fewer doctors. He was willing to make some important lifestyle changes that could help him achieve those goals and made progress toward regaining better health. He had also learned from the uncertainty he felt as his mother's health declined and did not want that kind of ending for himself. Bill made clear through an advance health care directive what measures he wanted and did not want performed on him should he end up terminally ill and incapacitated.

The take-away message from Dr. Houk's talk was that it is important to make healthy lifestyle choices

early in life in order to enhance one's chances of aging well, but also that it is never too late to identify and pursue goals that can improve health, even later in life.

Dr. Houk was recognized as the Hawaii Medical Association's Physician of the Year in 2012 and serves as medical director for the Arcadia and Craigsid retirement residences. He also has a private practice in the Queen's Physician Office Building 2. The event's



The 2017 Puaka'ana o ka lā (Rise Up!) Award recipients with Sunrise Foundation board members at the recent "Journeys to Wellness" program. From left: Honoree Dave Shoji; Ann Miller; Sister Joan Chatfield, Ph.D.; honoree Nancy Aleck; honoree Dr. John Houk and the Rev. Dr. Wally Fukunaga. (Photo by Kevin Kawamoto)

printed program included a quote from Dr. Houk: "I always want to give patients options. There are different paths one can choose to maintain and restore health. A discussion of lifestyle, including plant-based whole foods along with regular exercise, is what patients have come to expect at each visit."

Puaka'ana o ka lā (Rise Up!) Awards

The morning portion of the event also included an awards presentation to honor several people in the community who have made longstanding and significant contributions toward the promotion of wellness of the body, mind and spirit. Dr. Houk was one of the three recipients of the Puaka'ana o ka lā (Rise Up!) Awards.

Also recognized was Nancy Aleck, who recently retired after 13 years as executive director of Hawai'i's People Fund, which awards seed grants to grassroots organizations that promote justice and progressive social change. Recently retired University of Hawai'i Rainbow Wahine head volleyball coach Dave Shoji was the third recipient.

Shoji was introduced by Ann Miller, a longtime Hawai'i sports writer, who also co-authored a book with Shoji titled, "Wahine Volleyball: 40 Years Coaching Hawai'i's Team," published in 2014 by University of Hawai'i Press. Miller briefly recounted Shoji's legendary career, including his 1,202 victories, the four national championships his teams brought home for UH and coaching 87 All-Americans. He inspired young athletes to reach their goals and even to become coaches themselves, such as current Wahine Volleyball head coach Robyn Ah Mow-Santos and assistant coach Angelica Ljungqvist, both Shoji protégés.

In accepting his award, the 70-year-old Shoji joked that he was depressed by all the talk about aging. "First of all, I thought I was never going to get old." The audience chuckled. "Second of all, I thought I was never going to get ill. And I thought I was never going to die. Thanks for reminding me!"

The audience took his words with the light-hearted humor that Shoji had intended them. He then talked about his own personal health challenge, which ush-

ered in a more serious turn.

"I was diagnosed with prostate cancer back in January," he said. "It really pushed me toward retirement, which I did in May. And since then, I've undergone a lot of treatment for prostate cancer. I think I'm doing really well, but you never know."

Looking fit and energetic, Shoji said he has continued to lead a healthy lifestyle, eating well and staying active in retirement. He said he surfs three days a week and golfs three days a week, and his voice sounded both optimistic and determined.

"I just hope I'm an example to everyone else," he said. Shoji said he plans to hang his Puaka'ana o ka lā plaque in his "man cave" at home.

Workshop Topics

The late morning and afternoon were devoted to wellness workshops for the participants. Led by seasoned practitioners, topics included, "Spirituality and End of Life Issues;" "Building the Beloved Community with Storytelling;" "Sacred Paths of Energy Healing;" "Writing and the Coming Together of Body, Mind and Spirit;" "Purification, Art, Beauty and Nutrition;" "Secrets on Reclaiming Your Health;" "Reiki: Healing Through Balance" and "Stress Transformation." Participants could also get a free mini-massage. Another highlight of the event each year is caterer Sarah Loui's multicourse vegetarian lunch, which this year included vegetarian dim sum, and the fellowship in the church hall.

Sunrise Foundation

The Sunrise Foundation was established by the Rev. Dr. Wally Fukunaga, who convened the event and served as its moderator. The foundation is guided by a 12-member board of directors, with Fukunaga as its president. He started the nonprofit foundation after being diagnosed with cancer, hoping to promote wellness of body, mind, spirit and community through the vision and practice of integrative wellness. Although "Journeys to Wellness" is held on the grounds of a Christian church, people of all faiths and beliefs are welcome, and Fukunaga makes a point of creating a spirit of inclusivity. Maryknoll Sister Joan Chatfield, Ph.D., is the board's vice president and has a decades-long history of supporting interfaith dialogue and activities in Hawai'i.

One of the respondents after Dr. Houk's keynote speech was the Rev. Dr. Teruo "Teri" Kawata, whom Fukunaga fondly referred to as a mentor. Kawata spoke candidly about the challenges of aging — he is 90 years old — and also of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease, in this case his wife Kiku. Although she is now receiving care at a facility, Kawata is often by her side, to be present for her no matter what her mood or behavior happens to be on any given day.

In reflecting on his own long journey, Kawata left the group with these words of wisdom. "Life is a magnificent gift," he said. "Just an awesome gift. Keep giving. Keep growing. Keep striving."

In addition to the annual "Journeys to Wellness" event, the Sunrise Foundation sponsors fellowships, book study groups, public forums and workshops, and serves as a liaison to community organizations that provide wellness programs and classes. Readers interested in learning more about the foundation can visit its website at www.sunrisefoundationhawaii.org. ■

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