

Aging into Wellness - Dr. Gladys McGarey

Gladys Taylor McGarey, M.D., M.D.(H), has been a family physician for more than sixty years. She is board certified in holistic and integrated medicine. She is internationally known for her pioneering work in holistic medicine, natural birthing, and the physician-patient partnership. She was the co-founder of the American Holistic Medical Foundation. She is known as the Mother of Holistic Medicine. Her work through her foundation, The Gladys Taylor McGarey Medical Foundation, has helped expand the knowledge and application of holistic principles through scientific research and education. She and her foundation are currently actively involved in healthcare reform.

People have been suggesting that I retire for over 20 years. I have always believed that life is to be lived. I'm 92, but why would I retire? I've still got so much to do. Looking back over the past twenty years, I have been able to continue my work with children of leper parents in India, travel to Afghanistan to teach rural Afghani women safer birthing practices, write several books, and work toward the nation's healthcare reform. I wouldn't want to trade my way of living for a life of leisure and quiet!

I learned early from my parents that purpose gives meaning to life. Both of my parents were doctors. My mother was one of the first female doctors in the United States. She earned her degree in osteopathic medicine in 1913. My parents served as medical missionaries in the jungles of India. The jungles and the mountains were my childhood playground; they delighted my imagination and exhausted my endurance. I was blessed to be born and raised in the midst of the wonders of the world—the Taj Mahal and the Himalayas. In fact, my Mother went into labor with me while she and dad were visiting the Taj Mahal. It was an auspicious beginning.

It seemed that I was born knowing I was going to be a doctor. My mother told me that as young as two I was telling anyone who would listen that I was going to be a doctor. I didn't know how hard that path would be. Yet, because I knew, there wasn't an alternative. It was hard being a young woman in medical school in 1943. By the time I graduated, only half of the class had made it through. Still, I was naïve in believing that completing medical school would be the biggest challenge.

After graduation, I was able to become an intern at Deaconess Hospital—the only woman then to do so. The senior staff felt it their responsibility to make my life miserable and give up medicine. They didn't understand that being a doctor was something I had to do. I turned to the advice that my father used to give me: "Never give up." It became my mantra. Throughout most of my career, it seems, I have been "bucking" the system of medicine. Once I began to practice medicine, it seemed to me that the focus of medicine was wrong. I've spent all of my career

working to change the consciousness of medicine from a system with its focus on disease and pharmaceutical intervention to one that focuses on the whole person and promotes provider/patient relationships. I believe strongly that, no matter where we are in life, we have the capacity to age into health.

My oldest son, Carl, who was an orthopedic surgeon, graduated from his residency and said “Mom, I’m scared. I’m going to go into the world and I’m going to have people’s lives in my hands. I don’t know if I can handle that.” I said, “Carl, if you think you’re the one who does the healing, you have a right to be scared. But if you can understand that your job is to use all the methods, techniques, and healing that you’ve learned, and then use them to support healing, then you have nothing to be afraid of.”

We all understand that our current healthcare system is broken. Just like the popular nursery rhyme: “Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, and all of the king’s horses and all of the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty Dumpty back together again.” But that’s okay. It gives us a wonderful opportunity to create a new paradigm in medicine. My foundation and I are working to promote a paradigm shift in healthcare that changes the focus from the treatment of disease with a heavy emphasis on pharmaceutical intervention to the conscious treatment of people. This focus stresses prevention and wellness through lifestyle change, which includes conscious birthing, end-of-life care, and patient/provider relationships. It also seeks to expand healthcare access through insurance reform. We will be opening a conscious birthing and family sustainability center here in the valley next year. Through this center, we will emphasize the importance of every baby born being loved, valued, and wanted. With this consciousness, I know we can change the world.

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