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CALLING ALL DOCTORS

By Dr. Kerry Graff

After first learning the powerful truths about food, many people are motivated (for a variety of reasons) to change their diets immediately--until they visit with their physician. Unfortunately, that's when they are far more likely to hear words of caution than encouragement.

That's because most physicians are still eating some version of the Typical Western Diet themselves, and thinking that pills and procedures will fix the diseases they believe are caused by genes and bad luck. After all, they are just doing what they were trained to do.

Patients asking about whole food, plant-based diets today may very well know more about health-promoting nutrition than the doctors from whom they are seeking advice. This is not acceptable, but it is our current reality. And it's not the fault of the innocent physicians.

Even if the physician is aware of the profound health benefits of a plant-based diet, it is unlikely that he or she would recommend it to patients if unwilling or unable to adopt it personally. We are considered by our patients to

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be the best resource for dietary advice, regardless of whether that status is deserved, and I would argue that physicians have a moral obligation to give our patients the best possible advice. And since the schools of medicine are not likely to drop the “pills and scalpel” mentality anytime soon, it’s up to the doctors themselves to join forces and help each other, while trying to uphold our Hippocratic Oath to “First, do no harm.”

As Susan Benigas of Plantrician.org says, “We can only make so much progress on our own. We simply must find a way to get mainstream medicine onboard when it comes to the incredible, health-promoting power of plant-based nutrition. For, until they embrace the benefits of a whole food, plant-based diet; and, in turn, promote patient adoption, this essential dietary shift on a broad scale will be elusive.”

With the purpose of promoting that essential dietary shift, I have penned this letter to my fellow MDs and other medical practitioners. You might want to give a copy of it to your doctor.

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To: All Medical Providers

Subject: Prevent and reverse disease with optimal diet

Dear Fellow Medical Practitioners,

As medical professionals, we have the responsibility to provide our patients with the very best advice available when it comes to health. That includes advising them on what they should be eating. In fact, I would argue that dispensing sound, health-promoting dietary advice is our single most important responsibility. Why is that? Because

what a patient eats matters more to their health than any pill we can prescribe or procedure we can do.

Although not yet being taught in medical schools, there now exists a mountain of evidence supporting the fact that a whole food, plant-based diet can prevent, reverse or even cure most of the chronic diseases experienced in western society. It is now crystal clear that humans should be eating far more whole plants and far less meat, dairy, eggs, fish and highly-processed foods. With that *mountain of evidence*, it is now morally imperative that we educate ourselves and our patients about these powerful nutritional truths and their monumental impact on human health.

What can this powerful diet-style can do for our patients? For starters, studies have shown that more than 95% of heart patients adopting this diet will NEVER HAVE ANOTHER CARDIAC EVENT. Type 2 diabetes can be reversed in almost all cases and cured in many. And most cancers can be prevented or halted if they have already started. The health benefits are extraordinary.

From a personal perspective, I have had the privilege of watching many of my chronically ill patients get profoundly better when they adopted this diet-style after hearing my enthusiastic recommendation. Patients are overjoyed to be regaining their health and getting off their medicines. And, after years of feeling like I was just “sticking my finger in the dike” as I prescribed pills to treat chronic diseases, I have rediscovered the joy of practicing medicine.

But what if you consider a whole food, plant-based diet to be a little...extreme? Some doctors do feel that way and, as such, may be uncomfortable recommending a diet-style to their patients that they may not be willing to adopt themselves. To me, that is a big problem.

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Consider the millions of patients out there who would think that open heart surgery, colostomy or early death is much more *extreme* than eating broccoli, beans and apples. How would those patients feel if they found out that we knew about the power of diet to prevent, reverse and even cure disease, but chose not to tell them because of our own personal bias? Why should the innocent public NOT be told about this lifesaving information simply because their physician feels that it might be too extreme for him or herself personally?

As patients learn about the tremendous impact of a whole food, plant-based diet on health, some of them will enthusiastically embrace it. Others won't. But I passionately believe that it should be their choice, and that every patient should be educated so that they're equipped to make an informed decision--and offered high quality resources and support should they choose to try it. Isn't presenting it as an option when discussing prevention and treatment of disease essential for informed consent?

Imagine if we had a medication available that could prevent, reverse or cure the vast majority of chronic diseases and we didn't bother to even discuss it with our patients. Just imagine the outcry! Obviously, we would tell all of them about that new wonder drug because not doing so would be unconscionable. Dispensing sound, dietary advice for preventing and reversing disease is no different. Ultimately, the primary access vehicle for hearing the truth about the profound effect of diet on health should be the physician--whether or not that physician is willing to adopt a superior diet-style him or herself.

I believe that prescribing a whole food, plant-based diet should and will soon become the standard of care for all healthcare practitioners, regardless of specialty. In addition, while smoking status is routinely assessed at every patient

visit, evaluation of dietary health is neglected. This is despite the fact that the CDC estimates that poor diet is as harmful to health as is smoking.

One of the reasons we fail to assess diet quality is because we lacked a quick tool to do so...until now. The 4Leaf Survey, composed of 12 multiple choice questions about dietary habits that can be completed by patients in under 3 minutes, is that tool. The 4Leaf score generated from the survey serves as a dietary "vital sign," indicating the healthfulness of that patient's diet. For more information on the 4Leaf Survey and other tools to improve diet, please visit 4Leafprogram.com or read the *4Leaf Guide to Vibrant Health*, which I co-authored with J. Morris Hicks.

It is time for health care providers to truly promote in our daily work these words by the founder of modern medicine, Hippocrates:

Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.

Without a doubt, the process of enlightening our patients about the well-established, health-promoting and disease reversing power of plant-based nutrition is long overdue. We must urgently promote it in the medical community now, knowing that its adoption by the public will have limited success without the enthusiastic endorsement from the people patients trust most--us.

Please educate yourself on this critical topic by visiting nutritionstudies.org, plantrician.org, nutritionfacts.org or reading a few books on the topic. For abundant scientific and clinical evidence supporting the "mostly whole plant" diet style, I recommend reading *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell, PhD and Tom Campbell, MD.

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Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely, Kerry Graff, MD

P.S. In addition to being of profound importance to a person's personal health, I have come to believe that "what humans eat" is the most important topic in the history of humanity. The economic and environmental benefits of a plant-based diet are enormous.

Our highly inefficient, harmful and grossly unsustainable western diet is the primary driver of up to 80% of our cost of healthcare and practically ALL of our most serious environmental problems, including climate change. Indeed, the future of our civilization and our species is being put at risk by what we are putting on our forks and into our mouths. Luckily, the solution to all of these problems is one and the same—eating mostly whole plants. But then, it really isn't just luck, is it? For when we take care of Mother Nature, she, in turn, takes care of her own.

A Few Closing Words

Throughout this book, Jim and I have encouraged you to visit 4leafprogram.com for all the latest on the survey, the other tools, recipes, etc. That's also where you can find a printer friendly, pdf copy of the above letter--so that you can print it off and hand it to your doctor on your next visit. If you are not going to be there for awhile, you might want to send it via snail-mail.

One more thing, while reading this book, you may have found yourself wondering how we got into such a mess in the first place and why you've never heard any of this information before. Well, Jim Hicks tells the entire story in his own words in the Epilog that follows.