

# An Interview with Scott Stoll, M.D.

by Mark Huberman

**Scott Stoll, M.D.** is the cofounder of the Plantrician Project, the International Plant-Based Nutrition Healthcare Conference, the *International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention*, and the Regenerative Health Institute, a unique collaborative project with the Rodale Institute that integrates health with agricultural and environmental regeneration. He is a member of the Google FoodLab think tank, serves on the advisory board at Whole Foods for their healthcare clinics, and served as a member of the Whole Foods Scientific and Medical Advisory Board. Dr. Stoll is the Chairman of the Board for The Plantrician Project. He has appeared on national shows including the Dr. Oz show, hosted the 2018 PBS special *Food as Medicine*, and been in numerous documentaries including *Eating You Alive*, *Wait Till It's Free*, and *The Game Changers*.



**In doing some research on you prior to this interview, I read somewhere that you were once an Olympic bobsledder. Is that right?**

Yes, I was! I had this wonderful opportunity between college and medical school to participate on the United States bobsled team and actually made the 1994 Olympic team and competed in the Olympics that year.

**Wow! Is that why I am told you have such a kinship with Dr. Joel Fuhrman, since he was an Olympian himself in figure skating?**

It does bond us in a unique way! We both also share that distinction with Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, who was also an Olympian and another wonderful guy.

**With that amazing fame out of the way, let's turn to your introduction into the world of plant-based living. My late great father, Max, often used to say, "Most people don't worry about their health until after they've lost it," and by that he meant that most people don't consider a change in their diet and lifestyle until after some health crisis. Was that the case with Scott Stoll? Was there some kind of health crisis that got you thinking and living differently, or did you come to it though some other route?**

I came through another route. Thankfully, I didn't have

to face a health crisis, and I discovered it young enough before I faced any of those challenges.

**Why did you go to medical school? Were there other doctors in your family?**

I was the first doctor in our family. Growing up I always loved anatomy, and science was just a passion. In college, I studied nutritional sciences and loved biochemistry, and as I was going through the process of trying to understand how all of that might fit into my future, I decided medicine was the best course, but without any real understanding of how my nutritional interests would fuse with medicine in the future. Thankfully, I have that history.

**Were there any vegetarians in your family or anyone even inclined in that direction?**

None. I grew up in a very westernized family, but my parents were interested in health. My dad used to have oat bran in the morning with his orange juice and look for alternatives to sugar and chocolate—things like carob. And he was always exercising, but we all stopped at McDonald's, ate ice cream, and got milk from the farm.

**Do you then just consider yourself fortunate that despite**



Dr. Stoll competed on the U.S. Olympic bobsled team in 1994.

## following the standard American diet for so many years, you were blessed with a good constitution?

I do consider myself blessed to have had good genes and to at least grow up in a family where health was appreciated. Again, we exercised regularly, and we always ate vegetables from our garden, so I definitely had some foundation of health, which probably helped me avoid having to face a crisis in order to have an awakening about true health.

## I thought I also read somewhere that your wife was the one who beat you to the punch and got you to go vegan?

That is absolutely right! She had been a vegetarian for a few years, and one day during my second year of medical school, she said, “You know, I think we need to change our diet for health.” Of course, at that time I was not as wise as I am today, but I learned a long time ago that you always need to listen to your wife! As you might imagine, my initial response was one very common, especially for athletes. I said to her, “Well, where am I going to get my protein?” It took me a few years to catch up with her, but I ultimately gained the understanding that plant-based nutrition is optimal and provided all of the protein we need. Now, after 25 years of marriage, I have definitely learned that my wife usually has a better vision for some of those long-term things than I do.

## Was there a moment in your professional practice that caused you to rethink your medical orientation and training?

There definitely was. Early on in my medical career, I noticed that my patients were often telling me that they were just “falling apart.” It was a term that I heard even in family get-togethers. For quite a while, I thought it was just the inevitable consequence of aging, since that is what I was taught in medical school. And so, I treated my patients just as I was taught—with a prescription, a test, an imaging study, or a procedure.

Then one day, there was a woman sitting on my exam table, and she repeated that question I had heard so often before, “Dr. Stoll, can’t you help me? I’m falling apart!” I responded to her with the simple question, “Well, what does falling apart mean to you?” and was anticipating her response to be detailing her past medical history and side effects from medications and procedures. But she really stopped me in my tracks when she said, “My marriage is



Dr. Stoll and his wife, Kristen

*“As I walked out of the room that day, I realized that I was not trained to help someone put their life back together again. And I wondered if it was possible to help people reverse their diseases and reclaim lost quality of life.”*

falling apart because my husband is really tired of taking care of my health issues. I can’t travel to see my grandchildren. We are facing financial bankruptcy. I’m depressed. I can’t attend church.” And then with tears running down her face, she said, “Can you help me?”

And so, it was in that moment that I realized that all of these labels and names on her past medical history list were more than just diseases; they were factors that were undermining the most fundamental aspects of anyone’s life—their quality of life. As I walked out of the room that day, I realized that I was not trained to help someone put their life back together

again. And I wondered if it was possible to help people reverse their diseases and reclaim lost quality of life.

## Where did you start looking?

I started to do a really deep dive into nutritional research. It took me a couple of years of really trying to understand the right nutrition to optimize our cellular activity and physiology to prevent and reverse disease. But once I came to that realization, we flipped the switch as a family. We went a hundred percent whole-food, plant-based. We got rid of all the dairy and meat in our house. We got rid of sugar. We started eating whole plant foods, and we saw an immediate transformation in all of us. Then I did the same thing in my practice. Believe it or not, I started using my prescription pads to write breakfast, lunch, dinner, and smoothie options for my patients!

## Were there one or two books that finally helped cut through the confusion for you and pointed you in the right direction?

There were two that had a big impact. I first came across T. Colin Campbell’s *The China Study* just after it came out, and right about the same time, I discovered Dr. Joel Fuhrman’s best-selling book, *Eat to Live*, which I found really persuasive. I reached out to Dr. Fuhrman and had the good fortune to spend time with him in his professional practice. These experiences helped my wife and I solidify our health decisions as a family and changed the way I would practice medicine.

## Specifically, how did your practice change?

Amazingly, I found the joy of medicine, because I actually saw patients get well. You know, in the interview process for medical school, we all say that we’re going into medicine

because we really want to help people and we want to see people get well. But this was the first time in the practice of medicine that I actually saw people really get well and that they were grateful and excited about the changes they experienced.

It was amazing to be able to discharge patients that were getting better and say to them, "It looks like you don't need to see me anymore." They were

overjoyed! Their joy carried over into my office, because my office staff saw people getting better—and even they began to change their diets, and they also got well. So the entire environment or ethos of my practice became something living and vibrant, one where everybody was happy to be there. It truly brought so much joy!

### Tell me about the health of your family after you made this change.

Yes. My family has been blessed with amazing health! As I often say, the vast majority of my children, except for my oldest son, have never had antibiotics. (I have to except my oldest son, since he was about four when we changed our diet and lifestyle.) My children have never had any major illnesses. They've never had sore throats or ear infections. They are vibrant, strong, healthy, and alive because of good nutrition. And the same with my wife and I. My wife is 50, and I'm 51, and we have no medical issues and no medications that we have to take. Our incredible health allows us to keep up with our young ones and our grandchildren and to do things that others are not able to do. We consider our good health a great blessing!

**It has always been my view that one of the wonderful things about this diet and lifestyle is the control it gives each of us over our health destiny, and that is a very liberating concept. Of course, there are no guarantees in life, but do you agree that if you follow this health program you can have a pretty strong confidence that what you're doing is really going to positively control your health destiny for years to come?**

That is exactly right. We have this amazing opportunity to use our choices on a daily basis to transform our destiny. Of course, there are always things that we can't control, but



*The radiant, strong, and healthy Stoll clan!*

*“We can live vibrantly alive, fully alive, and physically capable well into our nineties and hundreds and accomplish great things all the way to the end.”*

**What do you say to those folks who say that your family history can play such a negatively determinative role in your health future? You know the thought process: I've got heart disease or breast cancer in my family, so it is just my bad luck.**

We are learning that this is simply not true. The science of epigenetics is giving us a powerful new understanding of dynamic flexibility, and almost elasticity, of our physiology. We now know that by making the right choices on a daily basis, we can turn on and turn off our genes. In fact, science is showing that even within three months, we can positively impact more than 500 genes with healthy lifestyle choices in our whole plant-based diet.

We also know that our body is dynamically responding to the food that we eat, and within hours of eating good food, we are turning off inflammation. We are normalizing the growth of blood vessels. We are optimizing the mobilization of stem cells to feed our body. We're turning on and turning off systems in the body bit by bit, and that allows us to enjoy vibrant health.

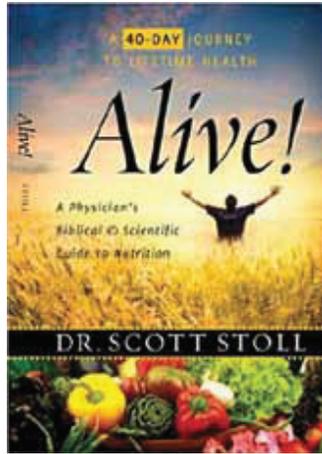
I think this is a very empowering concept for people to grasp. It is simply that your daily choices to enjoy the most nutritious, delicious food energizes you today and optimizes the opportunity for you to live a really healthy, long life span.

**One of the things that I find unique about your approach to all this is that you also find a biblical component to your philosophy and approach to health. Would you care to talk about that?**

Sure. As I was trying to understand how whole-food, plant-based nutrition fit into the context of my faith, I went back and started with the book of Genesis where it says early

it's really a powerful realization to know that we can do a lot to control and change the future of our health and that of our families. Our future doesn't have to look like the same present that we see in so much of the older population today. We can live vibrantly alive, fully alive, and physically capable well into our nineties and hundreds and accomplish great things all the way to the end.

on that God created plants as the primary food source for all living creatures. That gave me even greater validation and understanding of why there's so much power woven into plants, that when we shift back toward that optimization of our food system, that it seems to work so elegantly in our own physiology. I also discovered that when you look at the ancient Jewish people and other religious groups, they tended to trend back toward predominantly vegetarian or plant-based diets throughout history, and they ate meat primarily for celebration. And, of course, we know that the diets of Hindus and Buddhists are largely vegetarian or plant-based, and they enjoy some of the best health in the world.



### Was this integration of your thinking the motivation for your first book, *Alive*?

That was part of the motivation. The other motivation was my realization that in the Christian church today, there is a significant health crisis. In fact, research has shown that today evangelical church members are some of the least healthy of all the religious groups in the United States. They have higher blood pressures and higher cholesterol levels than any of the other religious groups. In addition, the health of their priests and pastors is more compromised than that of their parishioners.

And so, I recognized that this was a group of people that needed the education, and I believed that if they got the vision and received the education, that they could be very influential resources within their communities for helping to optimize the health of not only their churches, but also their local community.

### Why do you think that is? Why do you think their diet and lifestyle is so uniquely compromised?

That's a very good question. I think there are probably several answers. Number one, I just think it's been a blind spot for the church where they've kind of grown up in a culture of potlucks and eating food. And it's a culture where no one has stopped to ask the question, "Is this the right thing that we should be doing? Is this the right food?"

Number two, I think that within the religious community in general, there have not really been any substantial teachings, other than maybe in the Seventh Day Adventist church, about health. It's been largely ignored, often because of a dualism that has crept in through a kind of Greco-Roman thought where the evangelical church has had this belief that the physical body is not that important; it's only the spiritual component of life that's key. And so, they have

largely ignored the maintenance of a physical body.

Number three, I think there's not been much realization or teaching on the addictive nature of food, so it's been an accepted addiction and excess in the church. Of course, there's been lot of teaching about alcohol and drugs, promiscuity, other things along those lines. But no one has really taught about the addictive component and the emotional eating vices around food. So, lots of people with emotional challenges and issues will use food as a coping mechanism, but haven't recognized that not only is it unhealthy emotionally, but it's also compromising their physical health.

### Have you taken this kind of healthy evangelism on the road?

Yes, I have. Whenever I had opportunities to speak in churches, I loved to take that opportunity. However, I also found a number of years ago, after speaking in churches around the country, that the church was not yet ready for the message. I learned that before a church is able to move forward in a healthy way with this message, the leadership has to understand and embrace it first. They have to take the lead on this message, both personally and then professionally.

### I assume that you would also agree that proselytizing is often counterproductive and that it is often much more effective to teach by example.

Yes. We always have to lead by example. Our examples speak more loudly than our words, and our example gives validity and credibility to our words. I believe that if we're not living by example, we need to keep our mouths shut.

*“Our examples speak more loudly than our words, and our example gives validity and credibility to our words.”*

### I once heard you caution against those folks who are so enthusiastic about what they do and think that they become “like a dump truck,” emptying their entire load on people, and that this is not the best way to motivate people to adopt your ideas.

That's right. I often tell people that you want to give someone just enough salt to make them thirsty so that they'll come back and ask for another glass of water.

### Speaking of teaching by example, I believe I also read that you and your wife have homeschooled all six of your children. Is this correct?

Yes, we have. One of them has successfully graduated, and our second son will be graduating this year.

### What was the motivation for homeschooling?

There were and are a number of reasons. Number one, we really wanted them to have the opportunity to engage in a lot of the activities in which we were involved. So I frequently take my children with me on the road. They participate in conferences, and they have been part of our immersions. I usually have a traveling buddy that goes with me, and they sit in board meetings and go to hospitals. My wife and I want them to have the unique opportunity to experience life through a professional setting.

Number two, we really wanted to be able to craft and shape their education in a unique way to prepare them to make a difference in the world. We just really felt like we could do that at home by identifying their strengths and weaknesses and giving them some unique educational opportunities, like working on farms and studying under apprentices and broadening their education through those different ways.

**I imagine homeschooling also gives you a lot more control over their school lunches!**

It's been a real gift that we have been able to feed them wonderful, healthy foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And we actually ask our children to participate in helping to make their meals, which is a learning experience all by itself.

**I would imagine that by homeschooling your children, you have been able to avoid the challenge faced by so many parents in having to deal with compulsory immunization of school-aged children.**

That's true, and this is a real challenge today. Immunizations are a very controversial issue, and, because we are homeschooling, we have been able to avoid that, so our kids have been able to grow up without that strain on their immune system. I also believe that as they get older and are attending college or traveling around the world, their bodies will be better able to handle immunizations, if they become necessary.

**And at that point, they get to make their own choice on the subject, right?**

That's right. Homeschooling has created real space for



*Dr. Stoll's presentations are a family affair.*

*“I am very concerned about the number and frequency of immunizations that are taxing young, growing bodies and their immature immune systems, especially those that are compromised by poor food and exposure to pesticides.”*

**In the Natural Hygiene movement out of which I come, there is a theory or a belief that many of these contagious diseases like mumps, measles, and chicken pox are diseases that we are**

**actually supposed to contract when we are young, so that the body triggers its own natural immunity—the theory being once you get them, you'll never get them again. Are you familiar with that line of thinking?**

Not comprehensively, but I have read about that. I think the challenge for people today in the face of many of those diseases is that we are all being born with compromised immune systems, to the point that even a minor viral infection that shouldn't be a significant threat to a body now becomes a significant

threat. And we see really significant catastrophic consequences from some of these viruses as immature immune systems and compromised immune systems are trying to fight the infection. However, in my view, a healthy, strong, vibrant immune system can ward off a chicken pox or other similar outbreak without any catastrophic consequences.

**Let's shift gears and talk about the keys to get people to not only make significant changes in their diet and lifestyle, but to stick to them. Lots of people will go on a 14-, 21-, or 30-day “kickstart” program, but then revert to their old habits thereafter. In your experience, what is the best way for people to be able to stay on track?**

That is the million-dollar question and the one where the rubber meets the road. I also think that this is a critical interface between plant-based nutrition and transformation. I believe there are probably several keys that lead to long-term adherence.

us in this area.

**Are you concerned as a physician about the seeming explosion in the number of immunizations being given to very young children?**

I am very concerned about the number and frequency of immunizations that are taxing young, growing bodies and their immature immune systems—especially those that are compromised by poor food and exposure to pesticides, which are impairing the microbiome and physiologic function.

First, I believe that people need to have a significant motivating “why” that’s important to them, one that transcends short-term goals. A short-term goal might be like weight loss and appearance. But they also need to have a compelling motivation that reaches deep into their soul or core being that is vitally important to them. They need to recognize that their lifestyle and food choices have a direct impact on the realization of that compelling “why.”

At our immersions, we work with people to help them discover and own that compelling “why” for their lives. It seems like today, we far too often teach goal-setting in ways that help people achieve short-term goals, but we really don’t help people understand how to develop long-term visions for their life that are purposeful and meaningful.

Number two, I really believe community is the key ingredient to long-term transformation. If we’re trying to transform in isolation, without support, it can be very, very difficult.

Number three is hope. Hope is a very powerful emotion. Emerging studies have found that when people have hope, areas of the brain that are involved in long-term planning, organization, and strategic concepts begin to become activated.

**Along that line, it has been my observation that more and more people in this movement are using social media to create communities to provide those networks of support. Have you observed that being helpful?**

At the outset, it certainly makes sense to use social media as a good first step in creating community. However, I feel that the most powerful communities that lead to the needed longer term change are in-person communities, where people are seeing each other, talking to each other, and encouraging each other on a regular basis. As relational beings, that degree of connection is more powerful upon us than social media. Because of that, one of the things that I always recommend as a significant first step in making change is establishing a monthly potluck dinner. As people come together and share a meal together and feed each other on a regular basis, they develop really deep supportive relationships that lead to long-term change, accountability, and encouragement.

**Tell us about your medical practice.**

For almost 15 years, my medical practice was sports medicine, where I specialized in physical medicine rehabilitation. I continue to serve as a team physician at Lehigh University, and I continue to do the same for the United States bobsled team. I am proud today that every patient that I see gets an introduction to plant-based nutrition.

Throughout my years of practice, I have always tried to focus on identifying what was most meaningful to my individual patient, and that’s the way that I would pitch the plant-based nutrition. For a young person with acne, I would talk to them about how food choices could resolve it. With athletes, I would talk to them about the benefits of food choices in terms of recovery, injury prevention, and optimization of performance. I have always tried to look for the “hook” that would catch their interest and cause them to listen. This has led to an amazing transformation in my practice—something that all physicians who use food as medicine experience.

About three years ago, as The Plantrician Project started growing, I had to step out of full-time practice to help oversee the growth of the organization. So today, I only practice one day a week doing food as medicine—but primarily regenerative medicine, in the area of sports injuries.

**Let’s talk about The Plantrician Project. Tell me about its inception and how it’s growing.**

As I was transforming my own practice and spending so much time learning how to implement whole-food, plant-based nutrition in my practice and developing resources for my patients, I recognized that there was no easy way for physicians to learn about all this. They all found themselves taking the same pathways that I had—finding the right books, seeking out other physicians, and spending hours strategizing how to build a practice. One day, I proposed to one of my friends, Tom Dunnam, that we should start a conference to educate healthcare providers. Tom was a wonderfully supportive friend, and he said “Well, let’s do it!” So, we started our first conference in 2013, which has grown into the International Plant-Based Nutrition Healthcare Conference. We had almost 200 people at that first conference, but over 1,100 at our last one in Oakland, California. We have now grown to the point that we also do one on the East Coast in New York, and we have plans to do one in Bangkok, Thailand. In fact, I just got back from a conference in Saudi Arabia, and we are also planning to do one in London.

The conferences have also become a marvelous way of providing continuing medical education for healthcare providers who want to learn about the science of whole-food, plant-based nutrition and to understand some of the strategies and tactics for implementing food as medicine within their practices.

We have wrapped all of that inside of a not-for-profit called The Plantrician Project. We have another partner,

*“We far too often teach goal-setting in ways that help people achieve short-term goals, but we really don’t help people understand how to develop long-term visions for their life that are purposeful and meaningful.”*

Susan Benigas, who also serves as the Executive Director of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. Through The Plantrician Project, we also develop tools and resources to support physicians who are working with their patients. Finally, this last year saw us introduce the *International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention*.



Dr. Stoll is putting Plant Based Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine on the biggest stages.

### Are your conferences just for physicians, or are they open to anyone?

The conferences are open to anyone that would like to attend. However, I always give the caveat that it is a physician-level conference, and sometimes the presentations can be high-level and the language can be very medical.

### From the list of presenters I have seen on your website, it looks like you get a “Who’s Who” of the whole-food, plant-based health movement.

We’ve been very blessed to develop incredible relationships with so many of the leaders around the world who come to educate fellow physicians. One of the things that I just love about the conferences is that our vision was to use them to help create community, and that we have done. We feed people three times a day with beautiful whole-food, plant-based meals, so that when they come to the conference, it’s not just about education and listening to these amazing luminaries in the field of plant-based nutrition; they’re sitting around the table with people from their own community and from different places in the world, and they’re learning from each other, collaborating on research projects, and sharing information. I think it has really helped to build a plant-based community within the medical space.

### Is this kind of lifestyle medicine also catching on worldwide?

One of the most exciting things that I’ve seen over the last couple of years is how this movement is growing internationally. They have been holding conferences in the U.K., and as I mentioned earlier, I just got back from a conference in Saudi Arabia, where we had 400 healthcare providers eager to learn and share information about plant-based medicine. I met physicians from Germany and London and helped to start a conference with a not-for-profit group in Melbourne, Australia. So, this concept is spreading around the world at an exponen-

tial rate, and that is really exciting.

### What do you think accounts for that?

I think there are several forces that are driving it. One is the fact that there’s science to back up what we are saying, and that the science is building on a monthly basis, and for physicians, it is improving the health of their patient populations.

Two, I think there’s a movement in the healthcare industry around the world where they are looking more and more at value-based outcomes and value-based care for patients. The industry is beginning to recognize nutrition as a primary foundation for the prevention, suspension, and even reversal of diseases.

Three, I think that physicians and other healthcare providers are burned out and tired, and they are looking for ways to regenerate themselves so they can better help their patients—and they are finding that plant-based nutrition is the vehicle.

Number four, I think there is an environmental component. There is a growing environmental recognition of the power of the plate that is developing right alongside of plant-based nutrition that is opening many eyes to the idea that when we change what’s on our plate, it impacts everything.

And then, one last thing that I think is also powerful is the effect of technology, like social media and documentaries. Never before have we had the amazing opportunity to have powerful documentaries like *The Game Changers*, which is reaching millions around the world in such a short period of time. The same is true for social media that is allowing for the sharing of research and ideas in meaningful ways that didn’t exist before.

*“One of the most exciting things that I’ve seen over the last couple of years is how this movement is growing internationally.”*

### As a long-time observer of the evolution of our health movement, it has been my observation that the information has never been more available for those that want to find it than it is today.

That’s right. It’s not obscure books on a shelf in a library or the good fortune to bump into someone to introduce you to that special lecture or video. It is just a couple of clicks away on your computer, tablet, or mobile phone.

### If memory serves me right, you are one of the featured

## physicians in some of the most recent documentaries.

Yes. I was very blessed to be a part of both *The Game Changers* and *Eating You Alive*.

**During my legal career, I devoted a significant amount of my time working with and sometimes defending folks working in lifestyle medicine over claims by medical authorities that their practices were outside the scope of their training and licenses. How do you find medical boards reacting or responding to physicians discouraging people with heart disease from taking things like Lipitor, or those with type-2 diabetes cutting back or eliminating their insulin?**

I think this a very relevant issue. I always tell physicians that are practicing lifestyle medicine, “You always have to practice good medicine; and food is medicine, and lifestyle medicine is good medicine. But don’t compromise good medicine by going beyond the bounds of the research.” I think there’s a beautiful synergy between the two, but I think we always need to be aware that food doesn’t treat everything and that there is still a place for medications and conventional interventions.

**Of course, the good news is that lifestyle medicine usually works, right?**

It definitely works. It doesn’t work for everything, but it works for most things.

**Let’s talk about some dietary choices within the plant-based movement. Do you subscribe to the NHA view that that the healthiest whole-food, plant-based diet is one that avoids added salt, oil, or sugar?**

Yes, I do. I like to teach patients that if we look at the diet that is optimal for reversing disease, it is one that is not only salt-free, sugar-free, and oil-free, but it is also one with a maximum nutrient density that includes leafy greens and beans and lentils and dark berries and cruciferous vegetables and mushrooms and herbs and spices. That’s the optimal way to reverse disease. Of course, I don’t want to draw a hard, black-and-white line for everybody, because some people are not able to flip the switch and go 100% SOS. So, in working with patients, I’ll present what’s optimal. And if they tell me they can’t do that, then I’ll say, “All right, well, where can we start?” And I’ll take anything that they’re willing to do as a first step, and I’ll work with them to move toward that optimal diet. I think if we’re too black-and-white and say that you are either “in or you’re out,” there are lots of people that will choose to be out, because they just don’t have the knowledge base or emotional quotient to be able to make the change at that point in their life. Or maybe they don’t have resources around them

or a community of support to make a comprehensive change. So, I have always tried to meet people where they are and help them take the next step, and then toss in the vision for what’s optimal and helped them get to that vision.

**It sounds like you are a proponent of Dr. Fuhrman’s GBOMBs.**

I am. I’ve learned through the years that the nutrient density he talks about is really important and that the higher the nutrient density in the diets of my patients—that is, the more exposure to micronutrients and phytochemicals—the more rapid the improvement in lab markers and biomarkers and the improvement in their symptoms.

**What about fats? Do you also feel that for most people, there is an important place in their diets for healthy fats like avocado and nuts and seeds?**

I absolutely believe healthy fats are very important, including avocado and especially small amounts of seeds—ground flax, chia, hemp seeds, and sunflower seeds. We know that our body needs fat, and it needs healthy sources of fat that come with fibers and phytochemicals and vitamins that assimilate that fat in the right way.

**What about supplements? Do you generally recommend some, and if so, which ones?**

All of us should be taking a vitamin B12. In the past, we were getting vitamin B12 from our work in gardens and with animals and even from our well water, where B12 naturally occurred from the soil through which it filtered. Today, our

food has been sterilized and irradiated, and many of us no longer have gardens within which we work. So, I believe it is necessary to take B12 on a regular basis, either daily or weekly.

**What about vitamin D?**

I recommend that people have their levels tested with their physician, and if they’re very low, take a supplement directed by the physician. But there are many people that are not deficient and don’t need the supplementation.

The other one that I think is important is iodine, which I find to be deficient in both today’s soil and food. You can obtain adequate levels from sea vegetables, or it can come from a supplement. Other than B-12, vitamin D, and iodine, supplements may be helpful for people who are really struggling with certain diseases or system deficiencies. But for the general population that’s not sick, I think we are taking way too many supplements, with the magical thinking that some-

*“The higher the nutrient density in the diets of my patients—that is, the more exposure to micronutrients and phytochemicals—the more rapid the improvement in lab markers and biomarkers and the improvement in their symptoms.”*

how this next supplement is going to be the key to our health. That notion can distract us from realizing that it is really what we put on our plate for breakfast, lunch, and dinner that is the true golden key to our health.

**Some people struggle with the terms “vegan” or being “whole-food, plant-based.” I believe I read Dr. T. Colin Campbell saying he came up with “whole-food, plant-based” just to have a terminology that was better than “vegan” or “vegetarian,” which did not necessarily communicate health.**

At our conferences we have avoided labels and just tried to focus on what people should eat. Colin and I have had this conversation, and perhaps there are better terms than “whole food, plant-based,” but we haven’t really identified that yet. Unfortunately, through the years, I have seen many unhealthy vegans and vegetarians who thought that simply because they excluded animal products from their diet that they were being healthy; but they weren’t, and so they faced many of the same diseases that people were facing who were consuming a westernized diet.

**So many plant-based physicians seem to focus only on the food we eat. But there is certainly more to health than what we put on our plates. What kind of importance do you attribute to exercise, rest and sleep, and keeping our emotions in check?**

I teach people that food is a foundation. Food is an important cornerstone, perhaps the most important cornerstone, in preventing, reversing, and suspending disease. I say that because we have seen that, even in the absence of exercise, people can reverse disease and lose weight. But I also point out to people that one of the wild cards in our health is stress, and if we’re not careful, it can even undermine the benefits of a whole-food, plant-based diet. So, learning to mitigate stress is very important, and because of



*The Plantrician Project is planning International Plant-Based Nutrition Healthcare Conferences in Bangkok, London, and New York.*

*“We are taking way too many supplements, with the magical thinking that somehow this next supplement is going to be the key to our health. That notion can distract us from realizing that it is really what we put on our plate for breakfast, lunch, and dinner that is the true golden key to our health.”*

is very important. I often tell people, “Do not even think about it as exercise. Find some kind of physical activity or movement that you love to do, and just do it every day for 30 minutes.”

Finally, I think that sleep is very important, as well, and there is some amazing literature documenting its benefits. If we’re not getting seven to eight hours of sleep per night, our body sees that as a stressor. It prevents us from entering into that restorative component of sleep, and our body is unable to rebuild and regenerate itself through that nighttime sleep cycle.

**In your years of research into plant-based living and the prevention and reversal of disease, did you have occasion to delve into the works of Dr. Herbert Shelton and the 18th and 19th century hygienists, who first began to focus on the fact that health care is self care and that modern medicine got off track in its focus on suppressing symptoms of disease rather than trying to identify their causes and remove them?**

I have read some of the works of the natural hygienists and recognized how far ahead of their time they were and how they really helped to pave the way for all of us through their writings. I think these early thought leaders had some really profound insights that can even help bring some better understanding to research projects that need to be done today.

that, I talk to patients at great length about stress management and not allowing stress to be a daily component of their lives, because it will dramatically alter their physiology, destroy their microbiome, and lead to diseases.

At the same time, exercise is very important, and there are benefits that we get from exercise that we don’t get from food. So, finding some way to incorporate 30 minutes of movement into your day



Over 1,100 physicians attended the 2019 International Plant-Based Nutrition Conference in Oakland, CA.

### **Tell us a little more about The Plantrician Project and the resources it makes available to us.**

The Plantrician Project website can be found at [planttricianproject.org](http://planttricianproject.org), where you can find lots of great resources and information about our conferences. We have a special website for our large annual conference in California, and it can be found at [PBNHC.com](http://PBNHC.com). We have also created a wonderful, free health journal dedicated to the science of plant-based nutrition called the *International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention*; its website is [ijdrp.org](http://ijdrp.org). The journal is also completely free of all marketing and advertising. We decided to take no money from any advertisers, companies, or marketing so it could remain independent in its editorial nature. We will have three editions coming out in 2020.

### **Are all of these entities 501(c)(3), so if people make donations, they are tax deductible?**

They absolutely are, and we certainly appreciate all the donations. They go right back into the organization and allow us to continue to build out the resources. In fact, one of our newest resources that we are just launching is called [plantbaseddocs.com](http://plantbaseddocs.com). It is a global geo directory of plant-based healthcare physicians. We believe that this will be a wonderful way for patients to find physicians who can help them overcome their diseases through plant-based nutrition and lifestyle medicine. We have built it on an artificial intelligence platform that will be searchable through any number of variables and help connect patients with the right physician who can help them with their problem.

### **You know, when I interviewed your colleague Kim Williams, I think he said that, "Until you get the doctors to change, you're going to have a hard time getting them to get their patients to change." Do you agree with him?**

He is exactly right—and that's what we believe and why we started The Plantrician Project. We've all seen far too many patients that were enthusiastic about making a lifestyle change, only to experience a negative one- or two-sentence

response from their doctor, which only served to steal their enthusiasm and cast doubt on the plant-based nutrition approach they are trying out. Our goal is to go into healthcare systems and speak with healthcare providers and help them see and understand the solid science supporting plant-based nutrition. The hope, of course, is to get them to incorporate that into their practice, so they can support the thousands of people that see them during their career.

### **You must find it to be incredibly rewarding to see the growth of The Plantrician Project and the number of physicians coming forward to support your efforts.**

Mark, I am so blessed to be in this place at this time. It's the greatest joy for me to see healthcare providers practicing the medicine they love, enjoying what they are doing, and to hear them share the incredible stories of lives that are being transformed as they're sharing the good news of plant-based nutrition. As I mentioned earlier, they also see the joy returning to patients' lives as they have healthcare providers that are assisting them in lifestyle changes. I know we certainly have a lot of work to do, but it's truly a great honor and blessing to be a part of this movement and to work with so many wonderful people that are making this happen.

### **And I imagine that best of all for you is that you have your whole family on your side and participating in the journey?**

It certainly has been one of the greatest joys of my life to be able to do this as a family and for my wife and I to watch our children grow up seeing lives changed around them. To borrow from the old adage, all things are possible if and when we make the right choices!

### **Dr. Stoll, we in the NHA really admire the great work you are doing and are proud to support your efforts**

Thank you, Mark. It's wonderful to be aligned with like-minded people that have the same heart. We plan to support the great work you are doing as well. 