

# An Interview with Irwin Linzner, D.C.

by Mark Huberman

*Dr. Erwin Linzner completed his undergraduate training at the California State University, Los Angeles. He then went on to graduate Magna Cum Laude and as class valedictorian from Western States Chiropractic College. Dr. Linzner worked as an accountant and computer programmer prior to becoming a doctor. In 1994 he became affiliated with the TrueNorth Health Center. Dr. Linzner understands the importance of addressing the entire individual, physical as well as emotional, in guiding his patients in their process of healing. He incorporates soft tissue manipulation in the treatment of myofascial and connective tissue disorders, and spends the time to correct joint problems in the extremities as well as the spine.*

**When you were first introduced as a new hygienic physician to the readers of Health Science magazine way back in January of 1997, I recall that your door to Natural Hygiene came from reading *Fit for Life*. What was it about that book that you found thought-provoking?**

It was an accumulation of things. I've learned over the years that we always reject information at first, even if it's true, and I did this in my twenties. I had a good friend who was eating plant-based; I'm pretty sure he was vegan. And he would make salads and baked potatoes for me when I'd visit him. Then I would go to McDonald's afterwards. But then in my thirties, I guess I was about 34, I read the book *Fit for Life*, and it really made sense to me that we are designed to have an optimum diet, and if you deviate too much then things aren't going to work as well. And that made sense to me, just like nobody puts sugar and dirt into their gas tanks; we shouldn't be doing that either with our food. One day I said, "Okay, I'll give this a trial for a full week," and luckily for me I woke up after three days of plant-based eating and my energy just bounded; it was just phenomenal.

**Were you having any health problems at the time?**

Yes. I never had energy. I'd get up at 8AM but I didn't feel like I was actually moving until about 11AM. And I had frequent cold, and would be out of work for two or three days. I knew something wasn't right.

**One of the great things for the NHA was that *Fit for Life* and its authors, Harvey and Marilyn Diamond, didn't have an or-**

**ganization of their own, and so they referred people who wanted to gain more information about the program to us. Is that how you were introduced to the NHA?**

That was it. I started getting literature from the NHA, about once a month, and then one day I got a flier that Dr. Alan Goldhamer was giving a talk in Santa Monica, and I became interested. Also on the program were Dr. Jennifer Marano and Dr. Alan Immerman. Dr. Goldhamer spoke about water fasting and getting people well with fasting and healthy eating. It made so much sense to me and got me excited about wanting to make a difference in people's lives; so I decided to follow in Dr. Goldhamer's footsteps and go to Western States Chiropractic College.

**Were there there other books that you read that helped frame your thinking?**

I, of course, read almost everything from Dr. Herbert Shelton, and I was particularly inspired by his book, *Fasting Can Save Your Life*.

**After reading the book, did you undertake a fast yourself to fully understand the experience?**

At the time, my wife needed it more than I did. So I thought I'd let her be the guinea pig. So I sent her up to Dr. Goldhamer.

**What a generous husband!**

Well (chuckle), she had a history of smoking and was a little overweight, so I said why don't we send you up there to clean out a bit. She was open to it, and did quite a

long fast of over 20 days at Dr. Goldhamer's first facility in Penngrove, California, called the Center for Conservative Therapy.

### **Was that eye-opening for her?**

Oh, yes! It was eye-opening for us both. She lost weight and really looked radiant. It was just amazing. After that I did a fast as well, but only for about five days.

### **Do you remember the first NHA conference you attended?**

I think it was Georgetown University back in 1994 right after I joined Alan.

### **Were there other hygienic physicians that you met who were influential in your thinking?**

Two that impressed me a lot were Dr. Alec Burton and Dr. Keki Sidhwa. Believe it or not, on my bus ride from the airport I found myself sitting next to Dr. Sidhwa. It proved a wonderful opportunity to begin picking his brain.

### **How did you wind up working at TrueNorth?**

After doing my fast at TrueNorth, I was really impressed with the work that Dr. Goldhamer was doing, so I said to him, "I went to your talk in Santa Monica last year, and it really motivated me to do this kind of work; so I am going to go to Chiropractic College to involve myself in the same kind of work." To my surprise Alan said, "Great! As soon as you graduate, give me a call."



### **And you did?**

Indeed I did. Of course I checked with him as things went along to make sure he was serious about it and that he would still bring me on when I graduated. And he said, "Yeah, yeah, keep working. We're waiting for you." Immediately after graduating, he gave me the opportunity to do an internship, and when that was completed he made me part of the staff. It was a great experience.

### **I know that Dr. Goldhamer still offers internship opportunities to young physicians. Why is it important to do an internship in fasting supervision?**

It's the best, and probably only, way for doctors to actually learn what works and what doesn't. And it's pretty phenomenal to actually see people get well from diet changes and fasting. I've seen some pretty miraculous recoveries.

### **Are there any that really stand out in your mind?**

There have been many. In my first year at TrueNorth I helped care for a gentleman in his forties who was a drug addict, obese, and in congestive heart failure. When he was dropped off at the center, he was huffing and puffing just

trying to get to the door. And I remember thinking, "Oh boy, this isn't good. We are actually going to fast this guy?" I think he was referred by a medical doctor in Santa Rosa who told him that this was his last chance to get healthy. And that if we couldn't help him, there probably wasn't anything that could be done for him. Because of his situation, he was prepared to do whatever we asked of him. I don't recall how long we fed him before we started fasting him, but we fasted him about 34 days. Amazingly, after breaking his fast, this guy who couldn't walk from his car to TrueNorth's front door ended up walking up a significant hill nearby! He then started walking 10 miles a day and truly started a new life. It was really amazing to see.

### **During my recent interview with Dr. Frank Sabatino, he felt there was a great place for fasting and a hygienic lifestyle in the true recovery from addiction. Do you agree?**

Yes, I do. However, people recovering from addiction are often tougher to manage. But if they're motivated and are willing to do the hard work, they're going to get better quicker.

### **Over your past 18 years at True North, are there other conditions that you've seen respond particularly well to fasting?**

I remember a young woman, maybe in her late twenties, with severe rheumatoid arthritis. She could not reach her head to do her hair. She fasted close to three weeks and had a great result. I remember how excited she was when she was able to do her own hair again.

### **What do you think the power of fasting is?**

Fasting does a lot of things, but the one big thing it does is rejuvenate the body. During a fast you are breaking down old tissue and diseased cells that actually get rebuilt with new material. You get enzymatic induction, and you clean out your arteries. Excess fluid and salt leave your system. And your immune system strengthens; not necessarily during the fast but certainly afterwards.

### **Do you think that everybody needs to fast, or that everyone would benefit from fasting on some level?**

Yes, I think everyone could benefit from periodic fasting. Even if you eat a really healthy diet, I think every four to five years it's a good idea to undertake a fast to cleanse the palate, detox, and give your body a rest from digestion in a way that will allow the body to heal.

### **Is there a danger for people fasting themselves, and is there a limit to how many days people can go without supervision?**

Fasting of any significant duration should be done under supervision by a medical professional. This is particularly the case for people on medications, because dra-

matic things can happen during the fasting state. However, if you are not on medication, a fast of two or three days is generally safe.

### **Can people get off their medication following a period of fasting and diet modification?**

Absolutely! I have probably seen a thousand patients with hypertension who had normal or near normal blood pressure after fasting and no longer needed medication. I can count the number of failures on one hand. That's pretty phenomenal. And even if they don't get full resolution, they still see substantial improvement. The same is true for many people suffering from diabetes who were on medications.

### **How do you motivate people to adhere to the health program after a fast, and not slip back to hold habits and temptations once they return to their homes and jobs?**

For most people it's a process. The majority of people don't make changes overnight. What I see is that people get better each time they come in. So they may come once a year or maybe even twice a year. The first time they give up the cigarettes and the second time they give up the beer and they eat more vegetables. For others, they just get it and they do the right things for a while. However, stresses get in the way when loved ones die and people lose jobs, for example. After those types of emotionally charged events, people can fall back into old habits of trying to get pain relief by eating crappy food.

### **Is that what Drs. Goldhamer and Lisle call the "Pleasure Trap"?**

Yes. You feel a little better because you have some endorphin releases from the fatty foods you're eating. But this is very short-term. The damage, however, will last for days, and if you do that for any period of time, health problems start up again.

### **My late father used to say that if you went to a hygienic facility or you came to an NHA conference, it would "recharge your battery." Do you also find that to be the case at TrueNorth?**

Yes—not only physically but mentally. I think one of the most important things we offer is the daily lectures. We offer people two a day, affording them a wonderful opportunity to understand the things we recommend them to do. People often deceive themselves into believing that they are eating healthy but they actually are not. I had a new patient today who started just that way. He said, "I eat pretty healthy." But he was on hypertensive meds and he was a diabetic on medication. I told him gently, "Well, you know, the plant-based way is much better than what

you're describing." I added, "If you were actually eating healthy you wouldn't be taking those medications." That seemed to get his attention, and I was able to convince him to make dietary changes during his first visit.

### **People must find it very liberating to get off of their medications.**

Absolutely! You know, most people know that their medications are doing them damage. They don't feel well when they take them, since there are almost always toxic side-effects. So they know that they'd rather not be on medication; but it's still so hard for people to make the necessary changes.

### **Is that because taking drugs is so easy and offers a short-term suppression of their symptoms?**

That's right. I try to get people to realize that health is not free. You have to do a lot of work to actually be healthy. Health is not a given, and if you're not willing to pay the price of the hard work, you're going to be paying a different price, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, dementia, and / or a long list of very unpleasant conditions that western populations face. So which price do you want to pay? We hope that people choose the price of short-term deprivation where you'll go through a withdrawal period while not engaging in your usual short-term pleasure seeking activities. And that process may take two or three months. But if you're not willing to pay that price, you're going to be paying a much bigger price: poor health.

### **I think when I interviewed Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, he said it was his belief that nearly all of the degenerative diseases you were just describing actually need not exist. Do you agree with him?**

Oh, absolutely. It is so true. Obviously some of the cancers are not clear, and even healthy people get ill, but the vast majority would not exist if people followed our whole-foods, plant-based lifestyle. And then when people did have heart attacks, we'd be writing them up in the health journals because they'd be so rare!

### **Does everyone come to TrueNorth to fast or can they just come to eat and learn?**

You can do both. Dr. Goldhamer has hired a wonderful chef, and his staff does such a great job of presenting healthy foods. We actually get many people that come just to eat and exercise who can't fast due to their myriad of health conditions. We also have lots of people that come in just to eat or maybe to go on a modified juice fast because they're still on some medication.

### **How does juice fasting differ from water fasting?**

Both juice fasting and water fasting use the body's ability to burn fat and accelerate the detox process. Water fasting, however, is a much faster process of getting people healthier. This may mean, however, that there are more symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, back pain, headaches, itching, etc. So, people who don't want to go through the rigors of water fasting can choose to do juice fasting, which is typically less symptomatic. Also, for some patients who are on medications and/or where the doctor feels that water fasting is inappropriate, juice fasting can be a safer alternative.

### **How has the center changed from those early days when it was called the Center for Conservative Therapy (located in Penngrove) to TrueNorth Health Center (located in Santa Rosa)?**

One of the biggest things is that we've brought on medical doctors. When I first came on staff, we had Dr. Ron Cridland, but he left shortly thereafter, and for a while we didn't have any medical doctors. Today we are fortunate to have several serving the facility, and that is very helpful because we get patients with more significant health problems than we used to; and our medical doctors also have the ability to manage patients' medications and complex conditions. We get sicker people nowadays, but often even they can get off of most of their medications despite not being able to fast.

### **When patients stay at TrueNorth, do you collaborate with the other physicians there, concerning their care?**

We have weekly meetings, and the doctors discuss each patient's case to see what we can do better.

### **Do you have a specific role at TrueNorth Health, or are you just one of the staff physicians that do everything?**

I have two roles. I do the morning rounds for fasting supervision to make sure everyone is having a safe fasting experience. I also do chiropractic treatments for both our residential participants and local patients for a variety of musculoskeletal conditions.

### **What impact do you think documentaries like *Forks Over Knives* have had on this country's health consciousness?**

A lot. I've been on a plant-based diet for 28 years now, but when I first went vegan my family went ballistic. I remember one of my cousins saying, "You're crazy. You're going to get sick and die; you're going to have protein deficiencies." I just looked at him and chuckled. But you know, that was the mindset back then, not just by family and friends, but also the medical society, the media, and the American Dietetic Association. That's changed a lot, and much of the credit goes to that great film and the won-

derful work of the physicians profiled in it. Today, when you talk to people about getting on a plant-based diet, they usually have heard of it and more often than not even respect it.

### **Do you still have to defend such questions as, "Where do you get your protein?" and "Why don't you drink milk?"**

Yes, but not as often as 25 years ago. But many people still believe that protein only comes from meat and that cow's milk is necessary for strong bones.

### **What do you think of the "super food" emphasis being given to greens like kale, spinach, and bok choy? Is this the wrong way to think about simply good eating?**

Not at all. Dr. Joel Fuhrman talks a lot about micronutrient density, and he is right on. These green leafy vegetables are some of the most important foods to eat because they are very high in vitamins and minerals, as well as nutrients we probably haven't even discovered yet. So it's very important to eat your greens.

### **Isn't one of the great benefits of following a hygienic, plant-based, minimally processed diet is that you don't have to worry about how much protein, vitamins, and minerals you are taking in?**

Yes, it's such a relief. I know if I just stick to eating whole foods that are plant-based, with maybe a little exception of B12 and vitamin D, I really don't need to worry about anything else.

### **Are you optimistic that we are becoming more health conscious in America?**

Oh, definitely. As I mentioned earlier, there's been a major shift in awareness, and even fasting seems to be catching on. We're so busy here at TrueNorth because so many people are now interested in fasting. Recently, a major national magazine had an article detailing the experience of one of their writers who came and had a wonderful experience fasting with us. That article generated quite a bit of interest and business. So we're getting a lot of exposure, even in the mainstream media, about fasting.

### **Are you also getting a lot of interest from young physicians wanting to learn about fasting and your health program?**

Yes we are. We're getting medical doctors, naturopaths, and chiropractors who are coming here to learn what we do, and it's affecting how they think about health. And that's really how the change is going to happen in the future; it isn't what they're going to be teaching in medical school. What medical schools teach will only change after enough people say it's time to change.

*Dr. Sultana recommends a diet with both raw and cooked food because most people don't have the capacity to digest food 100% raw, and tend to believe the notion that enzymes and vitamins are destroyed by cooking. (Pictured above: stuffed eggplant and mushrooms over romaine lettuce.)*



**So tell me about the Linzner Family?**

My wife Carolyn and I have an adopted son who is 32 and he's got three kids. Carolyn is the office manager at TrueNorth.

**And has she stayed disciplined with the lifestyle as well?**

Pretty much. She had a little more trouble a few years ago, but she's been very good now for a couple of years, and she has lost a lot of weight. Everyone has to make those decisions for themselves; nobody can make them for you.

**What do the Linznors do for recreation when they are not admitting or caring for patients at TrueNorth?**

We do some hiking and occasionally go dancing, but my favorite thing to do is play Bridge.

**Bridge!!? That doesn't sound very vigorous.**

It's not, but its very competitive, and it exercises your mind.

**It's been great talking to you doc and catching up with you after all these years.**

Good to talk to you, Mark!