

**Interview with Professor Stefan Willich,
Director of the Institute for Social Medicine,
Epidemiology and Health Economics at the Charité
University Medical Center in Berlin**

1) Professor Willich, you're president of the 1st European Congress for Integrative Medicine in Berlin. How "European" or "international" is the event?

We've been pursuing the concept of integrative medicine for a number of years in Germany. A good example is the Pluralism in Medicine Dialogue Board, which was co-founded by Professor Jörg-Dietrich Hoppe, president of the German Medical Association. The first European Dialogue Board, which was held in Brussels in 2007, was well attended and showed that there is great interest among our international colleagues in participating in the discussion on integrative medicine. This is why we've invited specialists from around the world to come to Berlin and become involved in the scientific board of the congress. We're delighted to welcome so many leading scientists, who will be presenting their latest findings and thus actively contributing to the future of optimal patient care.

2) What are your expectations and hopes for the congress? How will it contribute to the development of integrative medicine?

The congress is meant as a platform where health professionals from a broad range of fields will be able to exchange ideas. Your run-of-the-mill medical congress focuses on either schoolbook medicine or alternative treatment methods, but doesn't usually offer this kind of multidisciplinary discourse. Our congress is meant to foster dialogue between the various partners involved, which in our case are not just physicians and scientists, but also healthcare payers, national and European healthcare policymakers and policy experts, and various service providers. An equally important event is the Patient Information and Awareness Day, which will take place later this year, on November 9. We invite all interested patients to attend and participate actively in the discussion about integrative therapeutic concepts.

3) Which partners have you collaborated with while preparing for this congress, and what has grown out of the collaboration?

It would have been impossible to include every medical indication in the first congress, so we focused on the ones most relevant to integrative medicine, including cancer, chronic pain, allergies, and cardiovascular and intestinal diseases. After deciding on these indications, we contacted the various medical societies and received mostly positive feedback—a sign of the great interest in integrative medicine and the desire to work together on this important concept.



European Congress
for Integrative Medicine
Together with the

**Deutscher Kongress für
Integrative Medizin**

November 7-8, 2008

Open day

November 9, 2008

Location

ICC Berlin
Neue Kantstraße | Ecke Messedamm
D-14055 Berlin
Germany

Congress president

Prof. Stefan N. Willich, MPH MBA

Institute for Social Medicine,
Epidemiology and Health Economics
Charité University Medical Center
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Deutschland
Land der Ideen



Organization

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Partners



Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Kardiologie - Herz- und
Kreislaufforschung e.V.



DEUTSCHE
KREBSGESELLSCHAFT E.V.



dialogforum
pluralismus in der medizin



Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Schmerztherapie e.V.



International Society for
Complementary Medicine
Research

NATUR UND MEDIZIN
Fördergemeinschaft der
KARL UND VERONICA CARSTENS-STIFTUNG



4) What opportunities are offered by integrative medicine, and how do you see this new medical concept developing in the future?

Patient requests for integrative treatment have been on the rise for many years now. Especially patients with chronic diseases are looking for a more holistic approach. But high demand for a treatment clearly isn't evidence of its effectiveness. This is why we strongly advocate and support further research in this area, not only to discover the potential of integrative medicine, but also to identify possible side effects and assess whether it makes sense from an economic point of view. Aside from randomized, controlled clinical trials, we place a great deal of importance on outcomes research, since this allows us to evaluate treatments in everyday clinical practice, and not just under highly artificial laboratory conditions. Our chief goal is to overcome the prevailing, and counterproductive, dualism in patient care that says we have to choose between one or the other: conventional or complementary medicine. We want to improve and optimize treatment for each individual patient.

5) Where do you see the limitations of integrative medicine?

Integrative medicine is not a panacea; adding integrative medicine to clinical medicine will not lead to perfect health. The idea, instead, is to combine both approaches to achieve the best possible therapeutic effect for each patient. Also, there is no reason to believe that integrative medicine will contribute to lowering healthcare costs—a demand that is often made of new approaches. The question of whether integrative medicine can help reduce costs for particular medical conditions will need to be evaluated together with the efficacy of these treatments.

6) What is the future of the European Congress for Integrative Medicine?

After its successful debut in Berlin, the congress will take place annually in various European countries. Many international members of the scientific board have expressed their desire for a regular congress. The German Congress for Integrative Medicine will remain in Germany and return to Berlin in 2009.



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