



EXPERT INTERVIEW

Dr. Richard DiCenso

Holistic Health Practitioner



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Dr. DiCenso: Hi. I'm Dr. Richard DiCenso, CEO of Matrix Transformation and author of *Beyond Medicine, Exploring in a Way of Thinking*. I started out after my graduation from Ohio University with a bachelor's of science degree in the health food industry. For a number of years, I opened a series of health food stores and health food restaurants. I got very interested in that whole process and, as a result, people were giving me feedback about the food being produced in the restaurants. They were amazed at how different they felt from eating at other places. They were encouraging me to explore what I could do with this. So I started looking around to see what my options were. I found there were two basic ways I could move at that point. One would move me in a way of conventional medicine, which had very little background in nutrition, or health, or for that matter, food as a healing substance. I looked at Chiropractic school, which is a little more wide open and has more options. Then I looked at the curriculum of both of them. I saw that for the first three years, the curriculums were identical. They basically were based on three books, anatomy, physiology and pathology. Then the fourth year was, "Okay. Now what do you do about it?" In conventional medicine, at that time, during the early 70's, the options were some kind of medication or some kind of surgery. In chiropractic, it was pretty much wide open. It was huge, whatever works. So, I opted to go to pre-med just to get myself some breathing room and create some options for myself. So, I went to pre-med in



Riverside, California. After I finished, I applied to Loma Linda Medical in Los Angeles College of chiropractic. And, after due consideration, I was accepted by Optic Chiropractic School. So, as part of my chiropractic training, obviously, we're exposed to a lot of nutrition and a lot of alternative therapies. About three years into my training, I had an opportunity to go to acupuncture school. So, I went to chiropractic school during the day and went to acupuncture school at night. I got my degree in acupuncture as well and, just as I was about to graduate to an internship, another opportunity opened up at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Beverly Hills. They wanted to explore alternative therapies. They were looking for people with different backgrounds to be a part of the experimental program. So, they offered me an internship at Cedars Sinai, primarily because I had a background in acupuncture as well as chiropractic. So, I finished my internship at Cedars Sinai. Then I went into private practice and started noticing something immediately. That was back when two people who came in with the same symptoms and the same diagnosis and were prescribed the same treatment responded very differently. One would either respond or respond to some degree and the other one would not respond at all. So I started to question the methods and the methodologies I was exposed to and realized I probably needed more education. So, I went on to three years and went to a place called the Spine Research Institute in San Diego. I became an expert in soft tissue injury and trauma rehabilitation. I realized the same thing, that no matter who came in the door, no



matter what they were experiencing, there was a particular protocol associated with that particular school that dictated what the treatment was going to be. So I thought, "Well, maybe I need more education." So, I went into naturopathy. I went into orthomolecular nutrition and went on into homeopathy. I went into extensive studies in Applied Kinesiology. For every single school of education, I found same dilemma. Here's the person who's experiencing the symptom. They're going to tell you what the symptom is and they're going to tell you what the diagnosis is or you're going to have to make a diagnosis. Then based on your training, or the perspective within that school of training, you're going to have to make a decision about what kind of protocol to introduce. So, each one, in my opinion, was very limited. I was never taught to think, never taught to think about asking the question, "Why is this person experiencing this? There has to be something more to what they're experiencing than just the physical meat suit that they're walking in the door with. So, from that point, I went into 10 years training as a forensic examiner. In my forensic training, I gained great insight into why I was experiencing that dilemma. The reason was because I wasn't taught to look for the cause of a concern for which an individual was consulting me. So, forensics provided me with that background. Because every time I had to testify in a high-profile trauma case, I had to make a decision based on the facts and evidence about what was causing what, instead of relying exclusively on either the prosecution or defense attorneys to provide me with that information. At that point, I really began to think. I began to draw upon my

background, everything I had experienced up to that point. I realized, number one, everything works but everything works most effectively when it's applied to a specific set of circumstances for what is most indicated. Number two, what I had been experiencing was a phenomenon called the Hammer and Nail Syndrome. When all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. It means that when all you have is the training, the background and the protocols to which you've been exposed, that's all you have the opportunity to implement in response to what an individual is experiencing. So, ultimately, I moved into developing an evaluation called the Matrix Assessment Profile, an assessment of the human matrix. At that point, I realized what I actually was evaluating as part of the human matrix was far beyond just the physical symptoms someone was experiencing. I was also capable of evaluating the biochemistry. I was also capable of evaluating the unseen influences that contribute to, and often times cause, physical symptoms but have no basis in physical reality. So, in other words, there were psychological, there were psychosocial, there were emotional components to an individual's life experience that had to be factored into why they were experiencing what they were. So, as I perfected this evaluation over a period of years, computers and software came into existence. I was able to extract myself from the laboratory and actually develop a process by which I could take urine samples, saliva samples and blood samples. Then I could make decisions about whether what we were seeing in that individual's biochemistry was causing what they were

experiencing. Or else I could see if what they were experiencing was causing what we're seeing in the biochemistry. Then once I was able to differentiate that, I was able to extract from a multitude of disciplines. Then I could implement protocols that were specific and very well targeted toward what was creating the symptoms for that individual.

Larry: How do you view the problem of sleep?

Dr. DiCenso: The way I view the problem of sleep is pretty simple. It's not getting enough sleep. It's a stress or stressor and being stressed makes it harder to sleep. Okay? So, the basics of sleep, all things considered, are probably a little creepy in the sense that for a third of your life, you're just not there. You're floating around in this expanded state and, at different points in that process; your brain is more active than when you're awake. This makes things like your eyelids twitch and consolidating memories from the day and solving problems for you. Except when it's dreaming, when it's making no sense at all and then sometimes you walk or talk in your sleep or drool or experience any number of other symptoms associated with this dream state. So, I started looking up what's going on and to start with sleep, ends up not being a monolithic process. It's a uniform phenomenon; instead there are different types of sleep. There's shallow sleep, that's also known as stage 1 or stage 2 sleep, where you're easily awakened. There is deep sleep, also known as stage 3 or 4, slow wave sleep.

Then there's rapid eye movement (REM) sleep where, if you watch a puppy, the paws flutter or your eyes actually turn around and dreaming is beginning to happen. These are not only different stages but a structure in architecture. So, you start off very shallow, gradually sleep your way down into slow wave sleep, followed by the rapid eye movement and then back up again and then repeat the whole cycle about every 90 minutes. Now, something at some point there is wrong with this architecture to produce sleep-related problems. So, not surprisingly, the brain works differently in different stages of sleep. There are a lot of ways to study this through. I'm not going to go into it during this dialogue but, obviously, the picture during slow wave sleep makes a lot of sense. Parts of the brain associated with arousal activity slow down and the same thing happens for brain regions involved in controlling muscle movement. The same thing also happens for regions involved in consolidation and retrieval of memories that don't have much of a decrease in metabolism. Pathways that bring the information to inform those regions actually shut down and dramatically isolating them. So, the parts of the brain that first respond to sensory information have somewhat of a metabolic shutdown but more dramatic changes are in the downstream brain areas that integrate and associate those bits of information, those sensory information pieces, and give them meaning. So what you've got is metabolically latent sleeping brain. This makes sense as deep slow wave sleep is when energy restoration occurs. This is shown by your sleep declaration studies, for instance. But if you look at sleep as a concept, sleep

appears necessary in a simple sense without going into all the neuroscience and the neurophysiology of it. Sleep appears necessary for a nervous system to work properly. So, too little sleep leaves us drowsy and unable to concentrate the next day. It also leads to impairment of memory and physical performance, reduced ability to carry out calculations such as mathematical calculations and if that sleep deprivation continues, hallucinations and mood swings could even develop. Then some experts even believe sleep gives the neuron of the brain's nerve cells that are used while we are awake a chance to just shut down and repair themselves. So, without sleep, these nerve cells can become so depleted in energy, so polluted with byproducts of normal cellular activities that they begin to malfunction. So sleep also might give the brain a chance to exercise important neuronal or nerve-cell connections that might otherwise just deteriorate from the lack of activity. Now, deep sleep coincides with the release of things such as growth hormone in children and in adults. In fact, if there's excessive stress, which we're going to talk about in a moment, it can suppress the release of growth hormone. There's actually a condition now called Stress Dwarfism that's a direct result of a sleep phenomenon. So, many of the body cells also show increased production and reduced breakdown of proteins during deep sleep. Since proteins are the building blocks needed for cell growth and for repairing damage from factors such as stress and even ultraviolet rays, deep sleep may truly be beauty sleep. So, activity in parts of the brain that control emotions, decision-making

processes and social interactions is drastically reduced during deep sleep. This suggests this type of sleep may help people maintain optimal emotional and social function while they are awake.

Larry: What symptoms should one look for?

Dr. DiCenso: If you're not getting proper sleep. In the absence of a diagnosed disease such as a brain tumor or a tumor on the adrenal glands or some kind of a medical condition like severe pain as a result of a trauma, then there are certain symptoms associated with not getting proper sleep. Those symptoms are going to be very obvious and very simple, for the most part. They are going to be things such as hitting the alarm five or six times before you get up because you just have not had restorative sleep. You're not ready to taste the new day and then, when you do get up, you're walking around and bragging. You may even have a mild headache at the back of the head. You have no enthusiasm psychologically or emotionally to embrace the day. When you do, you embrace it in a way that's half-hearted. So, you'll see yourself not being able to focus during the course of the day. You'll see yourself starting to develop digestive problems as a result of the substance I referenced earlier, the Glucocorticoids. They are stress hormones that divert blood away from the digestive system while you sleep and cause you to be unable to breakdown, digest and absorb food during the day. You'll see yourself craving

carbohydrates. You'll see yourself gaining weight. You'll see yourself not wanting to exercise. You'll see yourself not being able to focus, to concentrate, to recall, to make executive decisions, to pay attention, to concentrate. You'll see yourself basically just walking through the day like a zombie with things that can progress eventually into symptoms that mimic or represent things such as chronic fatigue syndrome or even fibromyalgia.

Larry: What aggravates the problem?

Dr. DiCenso: In a word, stress. And stress, it needs to be identified very specifically here, because we all have stress. So, what happens is, we encounter the day. Then based on our genetics, on the environment we grew up in and that we function in, based on the amount of stress in the environment, the type of stress, how much it is, how long it exists, how intense it is, how prolonged it is, how we respond to that stress, how we manage that stress, how we interpret that stress all are factors in determining how much it's going to aggravate the sleep process. That's because the sleep process, as I outlined, is a very well-structured architecture that, if disrupted, can create all kinds of secondary symptoms. So, essentially what happens is a substance called glucocorticoid is secreted in response to the stress of the day, whatever it is. If it's financial, if it's relationship-related, if it's job-related, if it's psychosocial, if it's your position in society, if it's your position in the company, if

your subordinate is opposed to A-type personality that is actually the boss or the head of the organization and has to make decisions and has to manage all of these people or can be things like stress from an improper diet, stress from too much alcohol, stress from an aberrant lifestyle. All of these things are stresses and stress does one thing and one thing only. This is with the glucocorticoid that triggers the release of a hormone in the part of the brain called the hypothalamus. Then that releases a hormone in the pituitary gland that triggers the release of good glucocorticoids. The glucocorticoid levels are going to dictate how much stress, how severely it's going to impact your autonomic nervous system, which is the nervous system that controls your non-conscious functions. Those are things such as if you were to touch a hot stove and you pull your hand away quickly. You don't have to think about that, it happens automatically. And there are two portions to the system. One is called the sympathetic, which is the gas pedal and one is called the parasympathetic, which is the brake. And so, obviously, if you have your pedal on the metal when you go to sleep at night, it's going to increase production of glucocorticoid. It's going to interrupt the sleep, it's going to interfere with the quality of sleep. So you're not going to get any restoration. You're not going to get any rejuvenation. Your brain function over a period of time, and including your memory and an area of the brain called the hippocampus, is going to deteriorate and lead ultimately to diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia.

Larry: How would you treat the problem?

Dr. DiCenso: Obviously, I would like to look at the whole person. I'd like to have some information about what your diet is like, what your lifestyle is like. I'd like to know how much water you drink, what kind of supplements you take, whether you take time on a daily basis for yourself. What kinds of strategies do you have in place for managing the stress you are experiencing. Then I'd like to look at things such as what kind of exercise you're involved in, what kind of beliefs do you have? Do you have a spiritual or a religious belief you can draw on that might assist in managing some of the stressors? Do you avoid the things that are known to disrupt or interfere with sleep on a physical or biochemical level, such as excess consumption of alcohol before bed, stimulants, watching TV while you're in bed and things like that? I'd like to get a feel for what the actual behaviors are that surround your sleep. Once I understand those elements of it, I have a couple of protocols I'd like to use that are based on the science behind disruptive sleep.

Larry: What dietary recommendations would you make?

Dr. DiCenso: I have three or four protocols from various supplement companies that I put together. But one I introduced almost immediately that I found to be most effective involves a substance called inotropic. It is a derivative of GABA (GAMMA-AMINOBUTYRIC ACID), which is a naturally-occurring inhibitory neurotransmitter. That means it's going to activate the parasympathetic, or



relax and digest portion of the nervous system, the brake, in other words. The Phenibut has been shown to have a calming effect that really can assist in instances of extra stress, anxiety and even depression. Ultimately it can assist in the improvement of impaired sleep. So, I use that in conjunction with a very important nutrient called Bio-Glucosamine Forte. The reason I do this is because of the mechanism involving the glucocorticoids and their subsequent effect on disrupting the normal sleep pattern by activating the gas pedal while you're sleeping. So, this particular nutrient works by supporting blood sugar. This leads to one of the several patterns of insomnia or interrupted sleep. So, one particular pattern is those who can fall asleep but they can't stay asleep. So, what happens is their blood sugar gets so low that now the adrenal gland, as a result of those cascative neurohormones I just referred to, gives a little shot of glucocorticoids to maintain the blood sugar levels. Just that little jolt is all the adrenals need to wake this person up. These are the people who wake up in the middle of the night. They start thinking of all the things they have to do during the day and boom! They're up, that's it. So, bottom line, if we can maintain a healthy blood sugar, we wouldn't need the adrenals to provide that extra boost. Now, another little trick with food is I have them take the last dose of this Bio-Glucosamine Forte before they go to bed at night, with a little bit of protein or a good source of essential fatty acids. This has the net effect of reducing the inflammation, sedating the nervous system and preventing the blood sugar from dropping while they sleep. Then finally, I'll use a product



called Neuro 5HTP that I'm sure everyone has heard of. That's because the neurotransmitters are in a dance with the hormones that is so elegant and so interconnected that gives the excitatory neurotransmitters do not have adequate inhibitory factors. Sleep or relaxation is difficult, if not impossible. So, creatinine is one of the main inhibitory neurotransmitters, which is part of the complex Neuro 5HTP. Then in conjunction with that, I'd like the last meal of the day to revolve around the Mediterranean diet. About six weeks ago, a study was released in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that took a group of people who had the worst lifestyles on the planet. They were doing everything wrong. They were 50 to 100 pounds overweight. They didn't go to doctors. They weren't on any medications. They ate fast food. They all smoked. They all drank. They are all jobless. They took blood samples with all the risk factors for all the major diseases and all they changed was the Mediterranean diet. They used that as the basis for the entire study. Twelve weeks later, all of the risk factors for all of these major diseases were reduced by 30 percent, just by introducing the Mediterranean diet. One of the reasons is because it contains the substances I use as part of my recommendation, the Bio-Glucosamine taken before bed, which is a little bit of protein and a good source of essential fatty acids. So, it's a great diet to support a proper and producing sleep environment.

Larry: What lifestyle recommendations would you make?

Dr. DiCenso: Lifestyle translates to a question of balance. Obviously, we want to avoid the stimulants. We want to avoid excess activity. We want to avoid confrontation. We want to avoid ruminating about the problems of the day or the problems that we anticipate are going to occur tomorrow. We want to implement a self health strategy toward managing the effects of stress on our body while we're awake, which will prepare us for sleep. The simplest, most effective, most inexpensive technique is part of all of the world's major cultures. It's called by a variety of names, but for the sake of not offending anyone or confining the essence of this recommendation to a name or a title. It involves a breathing technique and it's very simple. For about two to three minutes, as you lay down in a room that's dark, there's no noise, there's no television. You prepare yourself for sleep by laying out your clothes for the next day, turning off the television half an hour before you go to sleep, no stimulants, no excessive consumption of food immediately before you go to bed, and then you lie in bed. And if you have a problem falling asleep, you follow the breathing technique. It's basically taking a breath into the count of whatever you're comfortable with, one, two or three. That activates the sympathetic nervous system. Then when you breathe out, you double your exhalation period. So, you took a breath in to the count of one, two. When you breathe out, you breathe out to the count of four. That activates the parasympathetic nervous system. It puts you in a relaxed state of receptivity, allowing the normal sleep cycle to be initiated. So ideally, you can get up in the morning and take a brief period of time to



do the breathing I just described. Or else you can go for a walk so you're getting some exercise, fresh air and some sunshine, and you have the opportunity for your mind to calm down and focus on one thing. I like to use things such as guided meditation, guided visualization, and the affirmations. My personal preference is I download a lot of audio books. I listen to something that's nourishing, that is comforting. Something that is encouraging before I do anything else, before I look at an e-mail, pick up the phone, read the mail. I do this first thing in the morning for 60 minutes. If you can't take 60 minutes, honestly, 20 minutes is sufficient to help you establish that mindset. And then during the course of the day, if you are a coffee drinker, all of the recent research says you can drink two cups a day. There's no problem with that, no side effects to that and, in fact, it may, in all likelihood, reduce blood pressure, believe it or not. And then you want to be sure to get three to six small meals a day, instead of just eating breakfast and running out the door. Making sure you get protein with your breakfast is essential for maintaining normal blood sugar and maintaining a normal blood level of nutrients to sustain yourself throughout the midday potential for fatigue. Then eat several smaller meals (using your hand as a guide for portion control, with the palm of your hand being the complex carbohydrates, two of your fingers being the fats, two of your fingers being the protein) and then a few supplements on a daily basis. You can use either specific supplements, if you've been diagnosed with a particular condition, or, at the very least, five basic nutrients that every human needs every day. Those are a multiple vitamin, a multiple



mineral, a digestive enzyme, an anti-oxidant and a probiotic. Having done that, pace yourself throughout the day. So, for instance, I may get an average 500 reports a week and I may get 500 of them within a 48-hour period. So, I'll look at that 500 and I'll start to freak out like I'm feeling my sympathetic nervous system kick in. My heart rate goes up, my breathing gets shallow and then I make a decision. I don't have 500 of these things that have to be out within seven days. I decide to break it down into smaller chunks because that's how you eat an elephant, one bite at a time. Then all of the sudden, it's not so overwhelming. And then, during the course of the day, monitor how you respond to stress. So, adopting a technique, implementing the technique that will allow you to detach yourself from identifying with the perceived threat and simply respond to it instead of reacting to it. And then, of course, surrounding yourself with light people and gravitating toward people who are going to be socially supportive. One of the three major stresses on the planet that contributes to all those diseases, including insomnia, is a lack of social interaction. Then two major causes of all major diseases on the planet have nothing to do with any of the things I just talked about there, lack of job satisfaction and lack of self-satisfaction. Addressing those two things consciously will go a long way toward making your day, every day, a little bit better. And also pace yourself. Don't set unreasonable expectations for yourself. Recognize that life is a process and if you can do something every day in terms of exercise, maintaining your water intake, maintaining your mental attitude, managing your

response to stress, every day is going to get a little better. And eventually, you are going to come into what is called “allostatic balance,” which is a little different than homeostatic. Homeostatic means an individual system in the body is in balance. Allostatic means each of the body’s systems is in such conflict all day long that it throws the entire psyche off and as a result your interpretation of your perceptions and the way you engage the world becomes distorted. Then you take that distortion into the evening by distracting yourself with food, with alcohol, with television or with some sort of conflict. You just basically signed a death sentence for waking up during the night with some form of sleep disorder. So, it really is just a question of balance.