

How can I, as a Gestalt Practitioner, help someone with Rare Pituitary Disease?

My story may very well have begun over a decade ago. The unforeseeable way my life was about to change only just came into my awareness recently in October of 2018 when I was diagnosed with a Macroadenoma on my Pituitary Gland. Furthermore, it was discovered that my tumor was hormone-secreting, causing the rare disease called Acromegaly. Acromegaly is the over production of growth hormone caused by a tumor on the Pituitary gland leading to severe damage to the body and premature death if undiagnosed or left untreated.

You see, my story is like so many other stories I have heard leading up to diagnosis. I KNEW, I knew there was something very wrong going on in my body. I went from being someone who never went to the doctor to someone who over a five-year period went in to see my Primary Care Physician (PCP) numerous times pleading for some answers as to what was happening to me. I did much of my own research, requested tests and lab work, and did what I could to be my own advocate. But, there was a part of me that believes my doctor knew best. Sadly, my questions and concerns continued to be discounted.

I was an endurance athlete. I had a fairly regimented diet and training routine. I don't drink or smoke. I am an over-achieving perfectionist (which I am working on), and I love to keep busy, learn new things, and enjoy adventure, travel and the great outdoors.

My doctor would come back with questions that had a tone of blame to them, or perhaps disbelief, for example, "You've said you don't sleep very well. You really need to get more sleep. Do you think you are overtraining? What has your diet been like? What do you do to manage your stress?" You get the picture. I would come back with honest answers and the response I would get in return would be my doctor tilting her head sideways, crinkling her nose, saying "Huh, well that's just strange."

I would go a step further and tell her that my symptoms felt hormonal and requested that we test for hormone-related issues. She would say, "No you don't need that test" or "No, you don't have [this or that]." without even testing for it! I'd then say, "Don't you think it's odd that I've gained 40 lbs? I'm an athlete and I eat really well!" She would respond by saying "No, you're an Ironman athlete, I don't see that there's a problem. I'm writing you a prescription for a muscle relaxer for your neck pain."

In the Fall of 2018, my daily headaches and nausea became severe. I finally got to a point where something had to be done. I was barely getting any sleep and I had to prop myself up at night to try and ease the head pain. I asked for an MRI. My PCP said, "No, I don't think you need one." I said, "I hope I don't need one either, but I'd like to rule anything out." She continued, "No, they are expensive and I don't think you need one." I agreed with her for a brief moment, then I paused and said, "You know what, my deductible is paid, I want the MRI!". She reluctantly conceded, "Okay, but I don't think you really need one, but if you want to rule out more possibilities..." At this very moment, I felt as if she believed I was a hypochondriac.

One week later I get a one sentence email from my PCP:

"You have an enlarged Pituitary, you need to go see an Endocrinologist." And that was it. No explanation, no "You were right!" No information on who the Endocrinologist was that I was supposed to go see, nothing. I had no clue what she meant by an enlarged Pituitary. And what is an Endocrinologist anyway? I am not sure I even knew!

It was then, I knew I was going to fire my PCP.

Why Gestalt?

Throughout 2018 and 2019, I have been enrolled in a certification program for Gestalt Training to become a Practitioner. I have been immersed in this work for years and I have now finally become certified. Gestalt Therapy treats the whole person, taking all parts of self and bringing them together to make us whole. I don't look at someone as having issues that need to be fixed or removed. I see that we all have past traumas and hurts that need to be brought to the surface and mended so that we may move forward in a healthy way.

I had to do this around my diagnosis. I could not move forward with the anger and frustration I had with my PCP. I was staying stuck in a victim role and lashing out at other people in the medical field because of my unresolved anger around my Primary Care doctor. Not to mention the trauma I was feeling around being diagnosed with a rare disease. It was important for me to do the work around these events in my life so that I could get on with my "new" life.

Furthermore, some even believe that my tumor may have been the result of past traumas that I never dealt with, and in order to move past them and begin to heal, those past traumas must be worked through as well. Gestalt believes that our past traumas get trapped in the cells of the body, and this can be a real cause for dis-ease in the body.

Additionally, what I have been learning by listening to others who are battling rare Pituitary diseases, is that our stories are so similar. It's as if they are telling my story! And because I have been through it, I can understand what they might be feeling. When it comes to rare Pituitary diseases, not only are there major physical hurdles to overcome and navigate, there is an entire mental aspect that our medical doctors are not addressing...so I am here to help!

I am that support. I am that guide. I am here to listen. It's time to tell me your story. I will guide you through the process of exploration and transformation. How might I help you move forward into your "new" life?!

Risa August Heidt

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