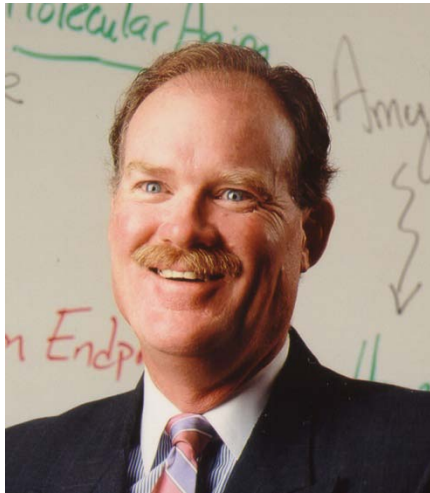


From: CommonWealth Magazine
September, 2010
Translation courtesy of Dr. Jyh-Lurn Chang

Take Control of Aging

Aging is not an irreversible process that only gets worse every day, nor is it a journey full of sickness and suffering. World renowned nutritional biochemist Dr. Jeffrey S. Bland advocates 'successful aging management' by understanding one's genetic potential, environment, and lifestyle early on; everyone can control his or her own aging process.



Dr. Bland was a professor of biochemistry at the University of Puget Sound and Senior Research Scientist and Former Director of the Nutritional Supplement Analysis Laboratory at the Linus Pauling Medical and Science Research Institute. Currently he is the Chief Science Officer for Metagenics Inc., a life science company in the USA. He has devoted his career to integrating traditional medicine and alternative medicine, and advocates functional medicine. In this interview with the CommonWealth Magazine, he talks about how to manage aging from a personalized and integrative approach.

In the past, medical experts mainly focused on diseases associated with aging. However, in the past 10 to 15 years, as more health-related information became available, more and more people realized the importance of not only treating aging-associated diseases, but also of managing the aging process itself. To reduce chronic diseases, we need to understand our own genetic potential and the influence of the environment we live in. Via personalized planning, we can achieve 'successful aging.' This is a paradigm shift from a disease-centered model to a health-centered model for managing aging.

'Anti-aging' is a contradictory phrase

People used to say, 'Aging is normal as everyone becomes 1 year older every year.' However, this process does not necessarily mean that it has to be unhealthy. I think that 'anti-aging' is a contradictory phrase. It generates expectations that are unnatural when aging is a natural process. What we can do is to learn how to delay the aging process.

Many people believe the concept that you cannot change your genes because you inherit them from your parents. However, this concept is being challenged. The genome is the book of life; every individual has a unique book. The book contains tragic stories such as illness but also happy, joyous chapters. The question is: how would you like your book of life to be?

An emerging concept is that a disease is not caused by a single factor, but is the result of gene-environment interactions that determine how genes are expressed. Many people inherited cancer-causing genes, but they don't necessarily get cancer. Some did not inherit such genes but they developed cancer in the end. Compared to genetic inheritance, the environment plays a more important role [in disease].

For example, 40 years ago, a British scientist discovered that when he reduced the caloric intake of lab animals by 20%, these animals lived longer. No one believed him in the beginning. But as other scientists in different laboratories repeated similar experiments using different animal models, they all found that reducing caloric intake without sacrificing nutrients resulted in animals living longer, some by as much as 35%. Therefore, when people say that aging is an irreversible one-way street, that it only gets worse, I would say this has been proven wrong.

Take control of the aging process

Another example is the case of diabetes. In the early 1980s, I was invited to give a talk on diabetes at the Hong Kong University Medical College. At the time, the college director told me it was a wonderful speech but Hong Kong did not have a diabetes epidemic.

Today, Asia is witnessing dramatic increases in the prevalence of diabetes and diabetes-associated blindness, neuropathies, loss of cognitive ability, heart disease, breast cancer, and other [conditions], similar to what happened in the US 30 years ago. The observed dysmetabolism and the associated diabetes prove what I have said; our genes have not changed, but our environment has.

In America, many people receive plastic surgeries. They may have great looking skin and appearance, but how is their overall health index? They may be very susceptible to multiple diseases and don't have healthy, desirable physiological function. Their lives are limited.

This is exactly why I don't support the concept of 'anti-aging'. Too many people end up working on the outside appearance and omitting what's truly vital. I am not against beautiful appearances, but I believe that the best method is through healthy aging. This way, we may show some lines and wrinkles and experience some hair loss, but with the emphasis on healthy aging, we can look and feel lively, healthy, and vibrant.

When I was twenty-something years old, people in their 20's did not get diabetes, heart disease, or cancer. But today, not only do we see a higher prevalence of these diseases in the older generation, it is also happening in the younger generation.

A younger person may say, 'Oh, there must be pharmaceuticals that can cure these diseases.' What I would say to that person is this: don't expect a drug to have the power to neutralize the result of 20 or 30 years of an unhealthy lifestyle. One should establish a plan for successful aging when she or he is still young. There are business plans, and there are financial plans. People should also begin their plan for successful aging and take control over it.

