

Local Doctor Prescribes Self Esteem for Better Health

To her patients at Bethlehem Gynecology Associates, Dr. Helene Leonetti gives a few simple pointers for good self care: drink more water, eat healthy foods, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. And one more thing: “Love who you are—right now.” Dr. Leonetti knows as well as any of the women she counsels exactly how difficult this instruction is to follow.

Dr. Leonetti shares her own experiences generously in lectures, private consultations and her book, *Menopause: A Spiritual Renaissance*. Listeners accompany her through her years as a nurse and later a doctor. Patients empathize with her joys and tears in relationships, marriages and divorces. Readers hearts break when she tells of the unhappy marriage and menopausal distress that threw her deep into depression and pushed her to attempt suicide. “Many of my patients see me as ‘together’, ‘articulate’ and ‘in-charge’, and they’re envious . . . I remind them that at one time I was severely depressed and refused to believe that life could ever again be joyful,” she recounts in her book. That life-threatening, life-awakening time helped Leonetti begin to see that she had been trying, her whole life, to change herself to make others love her more instead of accepting and loving herself.

Dr. Leonetti also cites in her book a survey by *Cosmopolitan* magazine that questioned 300 women about how they liked their breasts. “Each replied that she was unhappy with her breasts as they were,” she summarizes. She notices the same tendency in her Bethlehem practice, where she sees up to a 100 women weekly. “They come with a list of dislikes,” the doctor observes. “What I wouldn’t give to hear one of [them] say, ‘I’m healthy, happy and satisfied with myself just as I am.’”

The main tenet of Leonetti’s philosophy is that “our birthright is perfect health” but “we get in the way of healing because of our belief systems, our lifestyle, . . . the impact of our environment and our very unhealthy ecosystem.” Before heading to the examination table, she takes time to unearth each patient’s individual barriers to health. Her queries may be as elemental as “How are your bowel movements?” This scatological concern may seem more appropriate to misbehaved children, but bowel movements are an excellent indicator of whether a woman gives herself good nutrition, proper hydration and sufficient exercise. The doctor asks about stresses past and present, and about abuses they may have suffered, physical as well as emotional and psychological, whose results are just as devastating. “What I really want to know is how [they] feel about [themselves],” Leonetti notes.

At the end of the consultation, “every patient gets a hug”. But many of them shrink away, as if to ask, “Do I really deserve this?” Leonetti sees this as the heart of the matter: “A very basic issue with healing is lack of self-love, and women are notorious for leaving their needs to be met last.” They expend their energy to take care of the children, the house, the spouse or partner, and the job. When the time comes to look after their own needs, there’s nothing left. To illustrate the importance of upending this cycle, Dr. Leonetti uses a favorite example, the airline oxygen mask. In an emergency, airlines instruct passengers to put their own masks on first, then assist other travelers. “We can’t help others if we don’t take care of our selves,” the doctor reasons.

Leonetti brings her patients a wealth of knowledge about taking good care of themselves. She is an expert in her field, with 40 years in medicine, and a world-renowned researcher on the use of natural progesterone cream to alleviate health concerns associated with menopause and peri-menopause. She teaches those in her care to understand and honor their bodies and helps them re-frame the beliefs they’ve been taught about their female anatomy and nature. PMS becomes a time not for misery but for a woman to recharge her body and reflect on her inner self. Menopause is transformed into a gift, when changes in the body lead women from their childbearing years to a time of nurturing themselves body and soul.

In the course of her own life, Leonetti has come to realize that the health of a woman’s soul is as important to the mind-body-spirit triad as its other components. She doesn’t define spirituality in terms of religion. “Spirituality . . . unites us all to realize that if God is present everywhere and contained in each one of

us, then obviously no man is any less or better than another,” she explains. Leonetti practices meditation to access the divine within herself, and shares thoughts and instructions in her book. “During this quiet repose we are able to tap in to the cosmic wisdom that has been available to us always,” she posits. Meditation leaves her clear and centered for interactions with patients, and permits her to be more present in her life, so she can bring healing to others and to herself.

Leonetti will be the first to say she’s not perfectly healed, that there are still more layers of the onion to peel away. But she’s learned to look at her life patterns in a different way, to see what was hurtful and use it as a springboard for learning more about herself. “Self love is a very solitary journey,” she notes. “It doesn’t matter when we first start. It’s when we begin to have an understanding.” Dr. Helene Leonetti is working to initiate that understanding for women all around through her writings, lectures and medical practice.

Dr. Helene Leonetti will be offering “Self Esteem is the Source of Feminine Evolution” in collaboration with dance artist Tahya, at a Women’s Wisdom and Wellness Workshop on May 3, at Twin Ponds Integrative Health Center in Breinigsville. For more information or to make a reservation call 610-776-7045.

Learn more about Dr. Helene Leonetti via Bethlehem Gynecology Associates, 190 Brodhead Rd., Suite 205, Bethlehem, 610-882-3100, or visit HeleneBLeonettiMD.com.

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