



The Ommani Center – A New Healthcare Model

By Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, M.D.

Rachel Remen M.D. is a physician and mentor who inspired me 23 years ago. An article about her current work, *Medicine's Search for Meaning* was recently published in [The New York Times](#). It made me reflect on where I started as a young physician, and where I have arrived today as a physician who holds a vision of a *healed* health care system in my heart. I was a fledgling 3rd year resident in Internal Medicine at Stanford when I attended the talk that Rachel gave on 'patient-centered' medicine. I sat on the steps in the auditorium, listened to her and wept. My heart has remained open wide since that day at Stanford and I have pursued a path of LOVE and DEVOTION for my patients and it has been my hope for health care ever since.

As stories of entrepreneurs go, mine has been lined with challenges as well as immense creativity. I weaved in and out of corporate medicine after residency and left it forever in 1998 when I was told that "wellness is a conflict of interest for health care" and "preventive medicine does not generate hospital dollars".

I suddenly realized that the business model that corporate health care serves is exclusively a financial one. The dollar is what is served, not health, healing or patient care. Physicians are merely assembly line workers who generate money for the health care systems quarterly profits. My heart continually breaks for my colleagues who work in a corporate model that serves administrators and policies, not patients.

Let me tell you something about what a doctor's heart is like. As I talk about mine, I can assure you that many doctors entered their profession with similar stories and experiences and were seeking the grace in their work that fulfilled their passion to heal.

When I was little, I remember the first inklings of how I knew I wanted to serve in this capacity. When I was around people, I felt a deep ache in my heart. I didn't understand what this was for a long time. I knew I was always searching for why people got sick and how they could get well. I think I came into the world this way in addition to being raised around the scientific inquiry of my parents who are brilliant scientists. Because I loved science so much, I voraciously read everything I could get my hands on to help guide my understanding. Nothing was as fulfilling for my soul as seeking answers to difficult questions. I knew I had to spend every day of my life in this numinous place. Going to medical school felt like a natural extension of my passion for learning within the healing model available in our society. To be immersed in it and to be able to feel the joy that accompanied complicated problem solving was nothing short of bliss. When I was on the wards during my clinical rotations, that old familiar ache in my heart from childhood resurfaced. I now recognized it as LOVE. This strong and deep feeling, this ache, this love that I discovered I had for my patients has never stopped flowing.

I feel privileged and honored every time I am with them, ever since the first patient I ever saw. She privileged me as a medical student, to study her condition and honored me with her patience during my very green inquiry. Since that very first day, my patients have made it possible for me to explore answers with them. The closest I came to this with colleagues was with nurses during night shifts on call. I watched their dedication and devotion – a Florence Nightingale energy that held their patients in their hearts embrace. I followed them on the wards to learn how to balance intellect with love and to this day, owe my deep learning to them. They

mentored me on how to hold space and how to stay real in times that were stressful, during life and death, illness and health.

When Rachel Remen spoke of patient-centered care in her talk at Stanford, I was just getting ready to graduate from residency and enter my medical destiny track. That day, was the beginning of the rest of my career. It was as if it all came together inside of me and I received an 'initiation' of sorts into practicing medicine to honor the soul of my sacred vocation.

After I completed my training, I worked in corporate health care. No such feeling was present in that system. The numinous was unreachable. In fact, if my patients needed time and attention, I was penalized. I soon realized that I was now a worker on the assembly line, towing the party line and making money for administration that served the dollar, not the soul of medicine. After 7 years of experiencing this heartless model, I left it forever. Without a degree in business or any experience in running a medical practice, I took a leap of faith and designed The Ommani Center for Integrative Medicine – a place where I could practice medicine from that same sacred place that unfolded my path through medical school and residency, initiating me in this sacred vocation of science and healing.

Today, my intention for creating this Center permeates its presence. Despite my lack of confidence in running a business, I discovered that in addition to loving it, I was also a fierce advocate for patients. The Ommani Center was born as an answer to what I felt is missing in health care- my love for my patients and for being able to practice with heart and meaning without compromising the scientific method or patient safety.

The Ommani Center is a unique health care model. I created it with a mindset for sustainability, both from a financial and environmental context. The architecture was designed to give the feeling of 'flow'. The paint used on the walls, the water and teas served, cleaning products and even the soap we use to wash hands and cotton gowns are all environmentally friendly. We recycle everything we can and are fiscally responsible in how we manage overhead and even where we refer patients for lab and diagnostic tests. I believe that we all have a responsibility to keep health care costs down. It takes extra work, time and energy for all. On my end, I pay extra to have my medical assistants enter lab and diagnostic data (into electronic medical records) performed at labs that cost my patients significantly less compared to hospital based tests. I would rather pay the \$6000 – 7000 per year for staff time to save hundreds of thousands in health care costs. We must all do our part to transform health care. We cannot underestimate the power of one.

As a physician, I knew I would be sacrificing financial security to do what felt ethically correct for me. My moral compass came at a financial price. As a response to this, I shifted from a profit mindset to a sustainability one. The Ommani Centers sustainable business model has proven to be solid for more than a decade. Since 2001, it has sat gently on the earth, served patients with heart and meaning and kept its carbon footprint light.

Meanwhile, my colleagues in corporate health care, struggle to adapt to endless policies that micromanage them and restrictions that make it nearly impossible for them to practice from heart. Corporate health care is an experiment gone awry. In my least optimistic moments, I gain solace in knowing that The Ommani Center, a sacred health care model that stands in the heart of Pewaukee, Wisconsin is poised to be replicated in communities across America where patients and physicians are hungry to access sustainable, cost and therapeutically effective health care. This is my contribution to restoring the soul of medicine and for bringing meaning back into physicians' lives who have sacrificed so much to heal others and are less than able to in the corporate system today.

When I see them working under emotionally abusive conditions in the current system, I feel an unbearable pain in my heart. I want them to know that it is now possible to practice with heart and soul and to serve patients

rather than policies and administrators. The Ommani Center is like a lighthouse for health care. As it grows and expands in the near future, it will become a haven for physicians looking to restore their souls and reclaim their hearts as they follow the golden thread of their purpose for choosing their sacred craft.

I have come a long way since that threshold day on the steps of the Stanford auditorium. The vision in my heart that was ignited there continues to burn bright and is brighter each day as my beloved patients add their light to it.

Let us create the new model for health care together. Let us all remain true to its sacred purpose and mission so we can finally gain access to health and healing.

©October 2013 Kalpana (Rose) M. Kumar, MD is board certified in Internal Medicine and the founder and Medical Director of The Ommani Center for Integrative Medicine in Pewaukee, WI. She received her medical training at UCSF and Stanford University. She has been a physician for more than 20 years and focuses her practice on integrative medicine and women's health. Her book, *Becoming Real*, published in 2011, is available through Amazon.com in paperback as well as Kindle and can be purchased through the website, bookstore page, at The Ommani Center in Pewaukee. Learn more or reach her through www.ommanicenter.com or telephone 262.695.5311.