

# BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT

DR. THIRY TREATS THE WHOLE PATIENT, COMBINING NUTRITION, PREVENTION AND KINDNESS

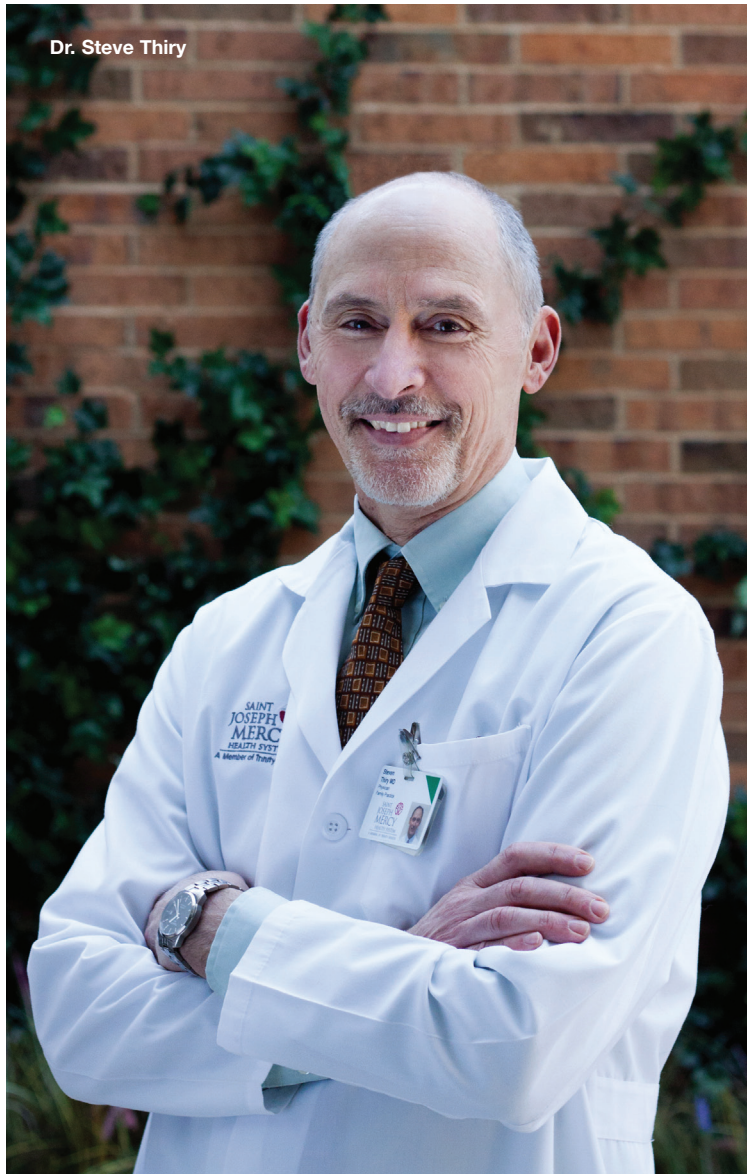


photo: Acacia Melia

“One hundred and fifty years ago, the old health practitioner would roll into town with his wagon and he’d have this tonic,” says Dr. Steve Thiry, a family physician at IHA Ann Arbor Family Medicine and chair of the Department of Family Medicine at St. Joseph Mercy Ann Arbor. “The tonic was good for everything – you name it, this tonic helped.”

Well, the good news is that this invigorating medical substance is still available today, and nearly everyone in the world has access to it. The tonic? It’s exercise. “Everything gets better when people become more physically active,” Thiry adds. “It’s so powerful. It just can’t be ignored.”

Thiry, who also serves as the co-chair of St. Joseph’s Wellness Committee, has been instrumental in implementing employee athletic leagues and many 5k and 10k walks to encourage better health. On top of that, he’s also a trained yoga

instructor who incorporates quite a few yoga techniques – stretching, breathing exercises and meditation – within his office for both patients and employees when needed. “As I look at aging, and people kind of shrinking and contracting, yoga is a really great discipline to stay long and loose, and to have your joints be able to fully move through range of motion,” he explains.

But before Thiry even set foot into a yoga class, he was interested in biology, nature and doing good things for people. “I’d always been a kind person. In fact, I actually thought about being a priest,” Thiry recalls. “I had this interest in life, and whole living and kindness, and what you could do that would be helpful to people.”

He earned his medical degree from the University of Michigan in 1980 and completed his residency at the Medical University of South Carolina. He now has over 25 years of experience in family medicine. Thiry says he initially embraced family medicine because it’s a discipline that focuses on the whole person – the family, the personality, the beliefs, their goals and so on.

This idea of “wholeness” and looking at the wider view of health and prevention led him to holistic medicine where he was board-certified in 2000 by the American Board of Holistic Medicine. “Holism, in general, means you’re appreciating the complexity of the person and not just focusing on the physical body,” Thiry explains. “Body, mind, spirit is the way most people think about holism. So, body is certainly important, but (so are) belief, thought, connection to others and emotion.”

His philosophy of care is to create health, harness healing and explore natural options, and it’s a philosophy that he embraced early on in medical school. “Even before I did any kind of holistic medicine training, I was always interested in nutrition. I had to pursue that interest, really, outside of the educational world because there just wasn’t that much focus on it in medical school or in training,” Thiry says. In a way, he took his education into his own hands by exploring nutrition and other natural therapies. “One of the things that we learn early in our training is: First, do no harm,” he says. “And so, one of the nice things about interventions that are in a more holistic realm (is that they) are often less likely to harm people.”

The patients Thiry sees each week are incredibly diverse. For example, he says, he’ll go from treating someone who is a type 2 diabetic with high blood pressure and high cholesterol to someone who has back pain, depression or is just there for a checkup. “Every single one of those patients would benefit from a holistic approach,” he says.

Not only does he teach his patients and employees in the office the benefits of eating well, exercising daily and controlling stress, but he also applies these key factors at home, where he grows his own fruit and vegetables all year, and has a sand volleyball court for working out and having fun with friends and family.

Outside of the old practitioner’s tonic, Thiry says the recipe for staying healthy is relatively simple: Eat more plants and take a walk every day. 👑 — Audrey LaForest

