

## Interview Everest Goldstein, M.ED, MSN, APRN, PMHNP-BC, IFMCP, Nurse Practitioner, Everest Functional Psychiatry and Wellness

Interview by Sheldon Baker

**Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal (IMCJ):** Tell me about yourself.

**Everest Goldstein, M.ED, MSN, APRN, PMHNP, BC, IFMCP:** I am a functional psychiatric nurse practitioner and started one of the only functional psychiatry practices in Dallas, Texas called Everest Functional Psychiatry and Wellness. I see clients throughout the state.

**IMCJ:** You focus on the functional psychiatry? What does that entail?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Functional psychiatry is really about combining functional medicine and mental healthcare and taking a root cause approach to treating patients. For example, we take something like depression or anxiety and instead of looking at them as stand-alone diagnoses, we look at them more as symptoms of something else that's going on. So, we ask what's the root cause of the depressive symptoms and how do we treat that root cause? Whether it's nutrient deficiencies, thyroid issues, hormone issues, trauma, whatever it may be we find what is driving the depression or the anxiety symptoms and work on correcting the underlying root cause.

**IMCJ:** Not many health practitioners offer the combination of health services you do.

**Ms. Goldstein:** I have not found a lot, unfortunately, unless I'm missing them. But no, I think in Texas there's really very few of us that are fully trained in both functional medicine and psychiatry. Throughout the states there are not a lot of people. Several people approached me after the presentation I gave at IFM asking if I knew any providers doing what I do in the states they were in because they have not been able to find such providers. It's definitely a needed niche area.

**IMCJ:** You take a holistic approach?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Yes. I take a holistic, integrative approach, really looking at the whole person. No person is the same, so we must apply that to how we treat patients to improve overall health.

**IMCJ:** You're different than most other health professionals

who do psychological evaluations in that you're not looking at the brain first, but rather lifestyle.

**Ms. Goldstein:** I think the brain reflects lifestyle a lot of the time. I will look at neurotransmitters and the brain too, but it's not the only picture. There is a brain-body connection. We have to look at the body as well as the brain, because the body and the brain talk to each other. The brain and the gut talk also to each other. For example, if you have gut imbalances, you're going to have brain imbalances, as well.

**IMCJ:** Does that include lifestyle and diet and exercise?

**Ms. Goldstein:** I look at all of those things. Diet is huge, as well as blood sugar balance, and sugar consumption. I want to know if my patients are eating enough protein, healthy fats, fiber, and what that looks like. Exercise is key too. Are you moving your body? What are you doing to move your body? How often do you exercise? How intense is it? What time of day is it? In terms of looking at sleep, I consider how we can optimize sleep and our circadian rhythm. I also look at nutrient deficiencies. Are you deficient in certain nutrients that can lead to different mental health conditions?

Hormones, thyroid and adrenal function also really play a big part in mental health. Do you have high or low thyroid? High thyroid can cause manic and anxiety symptoms. A low thyroid can cause a lot of depression, anxiety, and fatigue. If your cortisol is too high or low, how is that impacting you? Also, how do the medications you're taking affect everything physiologically. An example of this is that anti-depressants actually lower your cortisol. If you have high cortisol and you take anti-depressants, it may help you feel better, but if your cortisol is too low and you take an anti-depressant that's going to make you feel even worse. So, understanding the connection between lifestyle, diet, and conventional treatments can play a big part in resolution of symptoms.

**IMCJ:** Do you try and get your patients off drugs that they may be taking?

**Ms. Goldstein:** That's a really good question. I work with clients where they are. I think there's definitely a time and a place for medications. But I'm not a huge fan of

polypharmacy or using it to treat side effects of medications and then more medications to treat those side effects. I try to use the least amount of medications needed to restore optimal health. Some people may need medications, but the goal is to get people off of them to get their body optimized and working properly so that it can function on its own.

**IMCJ:** How or how do you respond to the patient that says, “I’ve been using cannabis and that’s really helping me?”

**Ms. Goldstein:** That’s another good question. In Texas, what I usually have people ask about, because cannabis not legal, is something called Delta 8, which is a synthetic form of marijuana that is legal. A lot of people have been coming to me taking that to help resolve their symptoms. However, I’ve seen it cause worsening symptoms, as well as psychosis in some clients. So, I’m not a huge fan of Delta 8 to be completely honest.

With cannabis, there are studied medical and mental health benefits; however, there are drawbacks to it as well. For some people it actually can worsen anxiety and depression, motivation, and sleep. It just depends on the person and how they’re using it. Are they using it because they’re fully addicted to it? Is it to help with pain going on in the body? Can we substitute something like CBD which is legal across states and are there other things we can do if they’re using it to treat a symptom. What else can we do to help their body resolve that symptom or what else can we do to treat that symptom?

**IMCJ:** I assume based on what you said, you are a proponent of dietary supplements?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Yes. Obviously there are side effects to everything. So, understanding interactions, and contraindications is important. I definitely do use those when needed, especially when there are nutrient deficiencies we may need to supplement or if we can support people with certain adaptogens that might help their adrenals or their thyroid.

**IMCJ:** You touched upon mental illness, which is running rampant these days, and maybe even more so since the pandemic. There’s also anxiety and depression. What do you think is the root cause of these health matters?

**Ms. Goldstein:** That is a tough question. My IFM presentation was called The Root Causes of Anxiety and Depression, and there are a lot. It really depends on the person. Some of the most common that I see are diet and exercise. Poor diet can include blood sugar imbalances, processed sugar, and a lack of fruits, vegetables and protein. I also think about exercise, or lack thereof, and thyroid and cortisol imbalances. We must also assess for nutrient deficiencies, primarily vitamin D, B vitamins,

omega-3s, zinc, and copper. Sleep is critical for both overall physical and mental health, as is social factors. For example, social support or spirituality decreases the suicide rate by 85%. It is also important to make sure people have coping skills, and different mindfulness techniques on board. If they don’t, then that can also increase depression, and anxiety.

**IMCJ:** A patient comes to see you and has some kind of a health situation, where do you start?

**Ms. Goldstein:** With every client, I have them complete thorough intake forms to give me more information about their health history before I even see them. I then have an in-depth 90-minute intake with them, which is basically a big history taking session. I look at all the information I can get from preconception and birth until now and look at trigger points. When did the symptoms start? What was going on at that time or right before? What could have triggered this and what’s making it worse? I also typically order labs at this time, whether that’s a comprehensive blood panel or specialty tests, like a stool test, hormone test or nutrient test. After gathering all of this information, we can create a plan based on all of the information at hand.

**IMCJ:** Any doctors in your area that have similar expertise? Those are some of the things that doctors, no matter who they are, need to focus on.

**Ms. Goldstein:** For so long, mental and physical health have not been considered connected and they are often treated as separate entities. In my opinion, mental health is physical health, and physical health is mental health. Chronic conditions cause mental health symptoms and mental health symptoms can be barriers to chronic conditions. If we are treating patients and not addressing both physical and mental health, I think we’re failing our patients. There are other providers, especially in the functional medicine world who are addressing this mind-body connection, and I believe this is increasing with time. However, there are not many functional psychiatric providers and there is an outstanding need in this field.

**IMCJ:** We recently lost a professional golfer to suicide. Obviously he had some medical intervention at some point, but functional psychiatry might’ve been able to help him.

**Ms. Goldstein:** Possibly. I’m not sure of the treatments he had, but I do wonder and hope that everything was looked at in a holistic manner? What may have been missing? Often there is some imbalance in the body that’s causing mental health symptoms to persist despite conventional treatments.

**IMCJ:** We’ve heard a lot about the vagus nerve. Would you agree that’s something that needs to be looked at?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Yes, most definitely. The vagus nerve was a hot topic at the IFM conference. I love it. The vagus nerve is very important because it helps move you from a sympathetic fight-or-flight state to a parasympathetic rest-or-digest state. When we're chronically stressed and have anxiety or depression, we are in this state of fight-or-flight, and our body's producing way more cortisol than it should. If we are in this sympathetic, over-stimulated state for too long, it's really hard for us to move back into the parasympathetic rest-and-digest, calmer state. Activating the vagus nerve is one of the best ways, in my opinion, to move us back into that rest-and-digest state and out of that sympathetic state.

**IMCJ:** The vagus nerve has always been around, but why is it all of a sudden such a hot topic?

**Ms. Goldstein:** I believe that there is more research coming about it. A talk I listened to with Dr. Peter Staats focused on new studies that will show all of these other health benefits that activating the vagus nerve can help with. I also think that people are looking for more answers and the fields of integrative and functional psychiatry are expanding. People are tired of not getting the help they need. We're now starting to look at treatments that are less invasive, more holistic, and improve our overall physical health, too. I think the vagus nerve is one of those treatments.

**IMCJ:** I referred to mental health and COVID earlier. Do you think COVID allowed mental health issues to rear its ugly head?

**Ms. Goldstein:** I saw a huge uptick in people struggling after COVID. With a lot of clients. I have found that many of their mental health symptoms started following the pandemic. I believe this is due to increased social isolation and/or sequelae after getting COVID and even the vaccine. Additionally, COVID has caused a lot of fear, people's jobs have changed, and mindsets have shifted. In particular, I think COVID has had lasting effects with the younger population, causing more adolescent anxiety and depression.

**IMCJ:** How has stress impacted mental health? Did you find that to be a big factor, and has it changed a lot since COVID because of the stress people may have experienced working at home?

**Ms. Goldstein:** It definitely did. I've seen a lot of the social isolation cause an increase in stress. One thing I look at from a biomarker standpoint is cortisol, which is our stress hormone. COVID has led to an increase in chronic stress and cortisol levels, which impacts physical and mental health. It starts to lead to more depression, more anxiety, and then it just builds upon itself. That's why I think it's very important to develop coping skills, possibly

work with a therapist, and stimulate the vagus nerve so that you can start to try to reduce that stress.

**IMCJ:** Do you think that once you've had COVID, you'll continue to have it again and again? What's your thought on that?

**Ms. Goldstein:** That is a tough question to answer. There is still so much we are continuing to learn about the virus. What's interesting to me is there are people who've been exposed over and over and never gotten it and then there's people that are definitely more susceptible. We know that you can be more or less susceptible to illness for a variety of reasons. I think setting up your body to work as optimally as it can and be as healthy as it can, will help prevent further disease, including the COVID virus.

**IMCJ:** To use the old cliché, at the end of the day what's the best advice you might be able to give a patient, in general, not just COVID, but with anything they come to see you? What do you tell them?

**Ms. Goldstein:** One of my biggest pieces of advice, no matter what treatment or what things we're working on, is to just take it one step at a time and set achievable goals. I think a lot of us are of an all-or-nothing or zero-to-100 mindset that's not generally sustainable. When working on lifestyle changes, I generally want these to become long-term habits. I don't want it to be you're eating better for a couple weeks and then you go back to McDonald's every other day. In order to create more permanent changes, I think the best way generally is to take it one step at a time, set obtainable goals and, once you achieve that goal, set another achievable goal.

**IMCJ:** Young premenstrual women are going through a lot of emotional and physical changes in their life. Doctors, for the most part, may prescribe medications to address their symptoms. Have you found this to be the case? And do you attempt to wean them off those drugs and hopefully put them back in charge of their life?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Yes. One of the key factors I see affecting hormones at this age is diet. The younger population can be very sensitive to certain foods, such as gluten, dairy and sugar, as well as food dyes. Young premenstrual women do not always have the cleanest diet, as they are eating whatever is served to them in the cafeteria and often eating fast foods and a lot of processed sugar. Yet they're very susceptible to the things they're eating while going through all these hormonal changes. Other lifestyle and environmental factors also greatly impact hormones, such as endocrine-disrupting chemicals. If they go to a conventional psychiatric provider because of mental health struggles due to hormonal imbalances, they may be prescribed medications like antidepressants, without first

addressing diet and lifestyle, and they're not always given the voice to talk about how they're feeling when they're on these medications since they're minors. It is important that we look at diet and lifestyle factors, use medications only when needed, and listen to our patients.

**IMCJ:** Children years ago, were not considered to be ADHD. They were just considered dumb, or it was just not addressed. Today, children are either diagnosed with having ADHD, or parents don't want them diagnosed as such because it can cause other problems. Do you feel such an issue needs to be addressed?

**Ms. Goldstein:** Yes, there's definitely been an increase in the percentage of children diagnosed with ADHD over the last few years. I think that there's a few reasons for that. One is because of an increase in children getting tested for ADHD.

I believe another contributing factor is diet. The food that we eat now is very processed and there's a lot more chemicals in it. It's different than food used to be. There's a lot more allergies as well now, as well as toxin exposure. Every year there's about 2,000 new toxins released on top of all the toxins that we already have. Children are very susceptible to that. All of those things can cause dysregulation in children, and that can lead to behavioral and cognitive issues, as well as ADHD symptoms.

The other thing I find is kids are sitting in front of computer and phone screens all day. They're not as active as they used to be. When we stare at screens, and I can even say this from my personal experience, we become a lot more impatient. Our brains expect want everything to work as fast as our phone or computer. It becomes really hard to sit there and be bored and be able to focus on something long-term because we're not as used to doing that. Instead, we're used to seeing something flash across our screen every two seconds. All of those things, I believe, have led to an increase in ADHD symptoms.

**IMCJ:** Is there a book or a piece of writing that has had the biggest impact on you?

**Ms. Goldstein:** One book I recommend to many of my clients is called *The Body Keeps The Score*, by Bessel van der Kolk. It's a book about trauma and how our body physically is impacted by and remembers trauma that's happened to us, It highlights the importance of needing to process traumatic events, so we are able to move forward with our lives.

The other book I love is called, *Why We Sleep*, by Matthew Walker, which talks about the power of sleep. There are so many people that say, "I'll sleep when I'm dead," or "I'll catch up on sleep later." What the data has shown is that catching up on sleep is not a thing. If you miss out on sleep that permanently affects you. Sleeping 12 hours in two days is not going to make up for the sleep we missed last night, so it's really important to prioritize

sleep. Not only does that affect your mental health in general, but it's also affecting every part of your life.

**IMCJ:** Both good topics to learn more about. Is there something about Everest people would want to learn more about?

**Ms. Goldstein:** I love to spend time outdoors and used to want to be a professional water skier when I was younger. This clearly did not pan out for me. But I still love to get out on the lake, hike in the mountains, and enjoy the beauty of nature with friends, family, and my corgi pup. I also love to connect with people and encourage anyone wanting to learn more about functional psychiatry to reach out to me via my website ([www.everestpsychandwellness.com](https://www.everestpsychandwellness.com)) or Instagram (@[wellnesswitheverest](https://www.instagram.com/wellnesswitheverest)).