

FROM FARM TO PHARMACY

By DIANE HERBST

IN December of 2013, wheelchair-bound Angelina Rotella, 91, of West New York, N.J., came to see internist Ron Weiss, MD, for help with congestive heart failure, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high triglycerides, which her daily regimen of pills was not effective for.

Given the choice of being admitted to the hospital or trying Weiss's suggestion of following a whole-foods, plant-based (WFPB) diet, Rotella chose the diet.

Within days, Rotella began to improve, and over several weeks, she and Weiss say, her high blood pressure and diabetes disappeared and her congestive heart failure significantly improved. She jettisoned the wheelchair and began walking.

Within months, Rotella lost 40 pounds; she now does household chores that she had previously been unable to do for at least ten years. And the medications? "We threw them right out," says

Rotella. "I feel great."

Eating a WFPB diet to prevent and reverse illness might seem implausible, but a growing body of research shows its effectiveness, and increasing numbers of MDs are embracing it.

Weiss has gone even further — in 2011, he sold his West New York practice to buy Ethos Farm, a 342-acre, 18th-century farm in Long Valley, N.J. and last October opened what may be the first farm-based primary care practice in the country.

A former emergency room doctor and board certified internist, Weiss sees patients at Ethos Primary Care several days a week, treating them with a whole-foods, plant-based program and medications when needed. According to Weiss, fruits and vegetables contain thousands of nutrients that prevent inflammation, which is believed to cause many chronic diseases.

"I know it's hard to believe that simple vegetables can have the power to reverse [disease] and prevent people



Convinced of the healing power of a plant-based diet, this doc literally bought the farm

Dr. Ron Weiss runs his practice from his organic farm in New Jersey. His produce is "living medicine," he says.

from aging before their time, but they do," says Weiss.

Weiss has launched a year-long preventative and

educational program and combined forces with an experienced farmer to grow acres of organic vegetables

available to the public via a community agriculture project. He is also combining his degrees in botany and

medicine to grow what he says is superior produce.

Weiss, 52, an assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark, discovered just how powerful this diet was shortly after he had finished his medical training in 1992, when his father was diagnosed with end-stage pancreatic cancer. Doctors at New York's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center gave his father one to three months to live.

Weiss investigated alternate therapies, including a WFPB diet. Once his father embraced that way of eating, "my dad had a miraculous journey," says Weiss. "It's as if someone sprinkled magic fairy dust on him."

Within weeks, his dad's severe abdominal pain had disappeared, he was back at work and exercising at the gym. Six months later, the tumors had reduced by half. Says Weiss: "No chemo has ever done that."

Weiss's father lived with vigor for 18 months, more than a year longer than

doctors had expected. The experience changed the way Weiss viewed medicine.

"Instead of using medications to suspend patients in states of chronic illness, we use the power of plants to reverse the diseases, and use medications only when necessary," he says. "Freeing patients from illness is what we love to do."

Cardiologist Robert Ostfeld, MD, MSc., director of the Cardiac Wellness Program and associate professor of clinical medicine at Montefiore Medical Center, agrees.

"Outside of emergency surgery, I've never seen anything come close to the breadth and depth of benefits that the WFPB diet provides. It's awe-inspiring. Blood pressure goes down, cholesterol goes down; many people have improvement in cardiac symptoms," he says.

"Many patients are able to reduce or eliminate medication; a number of patients had erectile dysfunction improve — and they are quite happy about that!"

Several years ago, Ostfeld, 44, was introduced to "The China Study," a groundbreaking and controversial nutrition book by T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D., and his son, Thomas Campbell, MD. Published in 2005, the book has sold over one million copies and focuses on the findings of a two-decade-long investigation in China

showing a link between eating a whole-foods, plant-based diet and reduced incidences of many illnesses, including cancer and heart disease. "It resonated with me," says Ostfeld, who adopted the diet himself. "I did additional research, and it was compelling."

In 2012, Ostfeld started the Cardiac Wellness Program at Montefiore promoting the

WFPB diet. After an initial visit with Ostfeld, he and a nutritionist spend four to five hours with patients — free of charge — teaching them how to embrace the diet.

Ostfeld, who teaches medical students at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and cardiology fellows at Montefiore about the benefits of the diet, admits some physicians are naysayers.

"It's disappointing to me," he says. "I've never seen anything have a more beneficial impact."

T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D. and the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor Emeritus of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell, says he is "very gratified" that his work has had such an influence.

"The public has been denied this information and it's that simple," says Campbell. "We can't go forward without engaging the medical community."

For more information on Ethos Primary Care: myethoshealth.com. For Dr. Ostfeld's program: montefiore.org/cardiacwellnessprogram.

Vegetables, fruit, legumes, beans, nuts, whole grains ✓

Meat, fish, eggs, dairy, oils, processed food, sugar, refined carbs ✗