

Shrink Rap Radio #37, May 31, 2006. Psychology and Longevity

Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Dr. C. Norman Shealy
(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Jo Kelly)

Excerpt: *“Self esteem, or lack of self esteem really is just one marker of depression, it’s one aspect of depression. By boosting the neurochemical mechanism that makes you feel good, people begin to feel better about themselves. Obviously I do emphasise that you need to deal with what I call your unfinished business. Anything that makes you angry, guilty, depressed or anxious should be dealt with. But you’ve only got three solutions. I’ve been preaching this for over 35 years. You’ve got three possible solutions to something that bugs you: you can have a fight, an argument or a lawsuit to try to get the person to change; you can divorce those that you cannot tolerate – with joy, because if you divorce them with anger you are no better off; or you do what I call “go for sainthood” – accept and forgive those things you can’t change. Now that’s easy, that’s the left brain approach, but by using some of the right brain approaches – Gestalt techniques, psychosynthesis techniques, some of the Jungian symbology – we can help people use the right brain approach to get insight.”*

Introduction: That was the voice of today’s guest, C. Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D. I’ve never had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Shealy but we do have quite a few mutual acquaintances, and it was suggested to me that he’d be a great person to interview on Shrink Rap Radio, so I thought we would have a chat. In the process I discovered that Dr. Shealy is one of the pioneers of the holistic health movement. I found out that he is an eminent physician with a long and successful career in both conventional and complementary medicine, and on top of this I learned that he is the founder of the American Holistic Medical Association and the author of 22 books and 280 other publications. As if this weren’t enough he is also the holder of a number of patents for a variety of medical devices. Most notably, he pioneered the use of spinal electrical stimulation as a technique for pain control.

In fact, he’s one of the world’s leading experts in pain management. He was among the first physicians ever to specialize in the resolution of chronic pain. In 1971 he created The Shealy Institute, the first comprehensive pain and stress management facility in the United States. In addition to his medical degree, he also went on to earn a Ph.D. in Psychology. Dr. Shealy offers seminars and workshops worldwide, which are attended by physicians and lay persons alike. His most recent book is titled *Life Beyond 100* and it

focuses on issues relating to stress, depression, and self-esteem in addition to such factors as exercise and nutrition in the quest for a longer and healthier life.

His website is www.normshealy.com

Hi latest book, *Life Beyond 100* is available
www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1585424315/shrinkrapradi-20

Dr. Dave: My guest today is Dr. C. Norman Shealy. Dr. Shealy welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Shealy: Well it's a great pleasure to be with you, thank you.

Dr. Dave: Now Norm, if I may call you so?

Shealy: Of course.

Dr. Dave: OK. You are one of the founders and leading spokes people for the holistic health movement, or what is sometimes known as complementary medicine. Let's start out by having you give us a quick overview of your academic training and background.

Shealy: Well I went to Duke University undergraduate and medical schools; interned in internal medicine because I thought internal medicine internships were far better than surgical ones; had a year of general surgery at Barnes Hospital Washington University; five years of neurosurgical residency at the Massachusetts General Hospital. I then spent three and a half years on the faculty at Western Reserve. I decided that the chairmen of neurosurgery departments were not the kind of people I wanted to be associated with the rest of my life. So I then went to the Gundersen Clinic in La Crosse Wisconsin, where I started their neuroscience department. We soon had three neurologists, three neurosurgeons and a neuropsychologist. Meanwhile I had been doing a great deal of work on the physiology of pain, and came up with Dorsal Column Stimulation, and TENS or Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation.

I started seeing 400 or more patients a year who had failed conventional medicine, and drugs and surgery. So, in 1971 I decided to find some way of dealing with the people who had failed, and I started the first comprehensive pain clinic in the country.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Shealy: And I soon realized I was dealing largely with psychological problems. So in 1974 I decided to go back and get a Ph.D. in Psychology so I could understand these people. I did that at Saybrook, and of course that was wonderful, that truly opened my eyes. The reason I went into neurosurgery, I was interested in the mind, but I found that neurosurgeons were interested in anatomy but not so much the mental, and emotional and psychological aspects.

Dr. Dave: OK. For the sake of our listeners, you referred to Saybrook, and I should mention that the Saybrook Institute is a graduate institute for studying psychology in San Francisco.

Shealy: And of course it is the premier humanistic psychology institute.

Dr. Dave: So now pain management centers are widespread, that's become an accepted focus of medical practice, but yours was really the first one?

Shealy: That's right. I started out with the idea we would do anything that's safe.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Shealy: So I got into biofeedback very early – with Elmer Green Ph.D. – talked with him, and Elmer became a mentor for many many years. Elmer Green of course was the creator of biofeedback training.

Then I got into past life therapy. If I had a single psychological tool it would be past life therapy. I think it's a powerful tool.

Dr. Dave: Really. So is that using hypnosis to age regress?

Shealy: Actually it's using a state of reverie. Some people go into a light hypnotic trance, but most are totally conscious. With a little bit of guidance and the right set up, ninety plus percent of people will suddenly see themselves in a previous life experience – could be hundreds of thousands of years ago – but it always has metaphorical meaning in terms of their current life.

Dr. Dave: Yes now that's what I wanted to ask you about. Do you believe they are literally experiencing a literal past life, or do you believe that it is at the metaphorical, imaginal level?

Shealy: Well I tend to believe that most of the time it is metaphorical. It is a lot easier for someone to say that Joe Smith in 1600 did something, than that they did it in this life.

Dr. Dave: OK, right.

Shealy: I think the subconscious of course loves to play games.

Dr. Dave: Yes, definitely. Yes I've just recently become interested in shamanism – that is getting involved with it in a more active way than I have in the past – and my sense of it is that it's working in an imaginal realm. I mean that's the level that I take it at, rather than literal.

Shealy: All the same I think that it doesn't matter, if it gives the patient insight and allows them to make change.

Dr. Dave: You know I recently read some statistics indicating that the number of Americans using some form of complementary medicine now is huge.

Shealy: Interestingly it is indeed. Over 50% of people now use *some* complementary – alternative, holistic, integrative, all kinds of words have crept in – approach. In other words they use something other than drugs or surgery.

Dr. Dave: Right. So how did you get interested in the holistic health movement?

Shealy: Well after I started working with biofeedback and past life therapy in the early 1970s of course I got started talking, and I got out on the circuit and I got interested in Edward Casey's work down in Virginia Beach, and all of a sudden the whole word *holistic* began to come up. There was a group founded in San Diego, Association of Holistic Health, and they began to have meetings in the mid 1970s, 1976 or so, and by 1977 they called a meeting of holistic leaders. Well, 100 people got together and most of them were a little bit flaky, I mean to say the least. After that I wrote to six of my physician friends and I said, look it's going to go down the tubes if we don't do something. So we got together and decided to found the American Holistic Medical Association which had its organizing meeting in May 1978 in Denver. We had 212 members – I always thought that was a wonderful metaphor for us – the boiling point had been reached.

Dr. Dave: Aha.

Shealy: So today there are over 1,000 members and there is a board – the American Board of Holistic Medicine – with approaching 1,000 board certified members.

Dr. Dave: Boy, it's really grown. I've been reading your latest book, *Life Beyond 100*, which is about age extension, and there will be a link to it on our website.

In your book you assert that psychological factors play a large role in health and in longevity, and I guess now this idea is not as radical as it was when you first started to explore it. What's been your experience in this realm, of the impact of our psychological life upon health and illness.

Shealy: (laughing) Well ultimately everything is really related to your attitude and your belief system. But that's how you choose habits. Now my belief is that a vast majority of people, if they had kind, loving, nurturing parents grow up remarkably intact. But unfortunately for the last 2,000 years people have been told that they are born in sin, for the last 5,000 years women have been put down, so there is this pervasive miasma of negativity that has been created by the churches to a large extent. I won't pull any bones about it anymore. People often ask me, why are so many people depressed? Well if you had been told you were a sinner from the day you were born, and if you had been told that you were inferior – which is over 50% of the population – how can you not be depressed? I think it's a miracle that any of us grow up feeling good.

Dr. Dave: I know in your book you really emphasise that depression has a very negative impact on physical health. You cite a lot of biochemical markers.

Shealy: Oh yes. I often say that there are more biochemical abnormalities in depression than in any other illness. We know that depressed people are deficient in magnesium, the vast majority of them are deficient in taurine, a very common amino acid, and of course all of them are deficient in one to seven of the essential amino acids. They have low beta endorphins, they tend to have usually low but sometimes high production of serotonin, they tend to have low but sometimes high levels of norepinephrine or “adrenaline”, they are off on melatonin, and they are off on acetylcholine or cholinesterase which is the one we can actually measure – the enzyme that breaks it down. Then DHEA is in at least half of them rock bottom below normal, and the other half are below an optimal level in the lower half of the

range. So 100% of people with depression have numerous biochemical and neuro chemical abnormalities – by the way cortisol tends to go up, testosterone tends to go down – it's a wide spectrum of chemical abnormalities.

Dr. Dave: Right, and in your book you also talk about Hans Selye's work and stress, and so I guess the result of all of these various biochemical markers not being where they should be, is that there is some kind of wearing down of the bodily systems, is that right?

Shealy: That's right. You know stress ultimately clobbers the immune system. Just being angry raises your – interestingly, one of the greatest markers is high sensitivity C-Reactive protein, which is an inflammatory marker – one of the common causes of a high C-Reactive protein is anger.

Dr. Dave: I know you have negative feelings about anti depressant medications. Is that right?

Shealy: (laughing) Well the way I put it about anti depressant drugs is this: the best of these according to the statistics published, the best is 42% effective, with a minimum of 25% complications – actually you really should say a minimum of 50%, because 50% of men and women lose their libido or become impotent on anti depressant drugs. I can get 85% of people out of depression totally safely, no complications, no drugs, within two weeks.

Dr. Dave: Now that's quite a claim. How do you do that?

Shealy: For the last 31 years we have used a little stimulator, called a Liss cranial electrical stimulator. It's so safe you could drive your car while wearing it – in fact I have done that many times – I've used it on planes going to and from Europe. It helps prevent jet lag. It resets your serotonin mechanism and helps you sleep better. It raises beta endorphins. We can get 50% of people out in two weeks just using the Liss stimulator.

Dr. Dave: And this is a device of your own invention, and you have patented it?

Shealy: I discovered its use.

Saul Liss is an engineer from New Jersey who brought it to me because I'd introduced him to Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation, and his device puts out only a maximum of 4 milliamperes (mA), whereas the ones we used to use for pain put out 50 to 80 mA. I found that when you put it on

the head at even 1 mA or a little less you actually “see” flickering light, and that’s what intrigued me.

So our first study was to show that it normalized serotonin metabolism in 80% of people, and we can put with that photostimulation – flashing light at 1 to 7 cycles per second. When we add that to the Liss stimulator and nothing else, we will get 85% of people out of depression.

Dr. Dave: Now I have to ask this, and I don’t mean to be antagonistic, but if such a device is that effective, why isn’t it more widely used and known?

Shealy: I think it’s quite obvious. I have published over a dozen papers on it, I have treated 30,250 people, I have given talks at dozens of conferences. Unfortunately, because the physicians have been so brainwashed by the PharmacoMafia they don’t do this. It’s not a drug. Physicians over the last 60 years have become pawns of the PharmacoMafia. Not all, but most.

Dr. Dave: I want to call attention to this word you are using, because people may not have heard of it. PharmacoMafia? In other words that the pharmacology industry is kind of functioning like a mafia?

Shealy: You bet. They are dishonest, they lie, they deceive, they hire people to give fake results. Even the vice president of Merck was quoted in the last six months saying, well you know that less than 50% of people benefit from our drugs.

There is a place for drugs, but I think that place is about 15% of what is being used right now.

Dr. Dave: Have you done any double blind study with this Liss device?

Shealy: Oh yes, all of this has been done, we have been doing it over and over again for over 30 years. There are other people who do pick it up. There is a neurosurgeon in Dayton Ohio who has now become quite enthusiastic about it. There is a hospital up in Soldotna Alaska that is now using it. I’ve got half a dozen physicians who are now using it, and they get the same results I do.

Dr. Dave: That sounds great. Now you also talk about low self esteem – and maybe it’s not exactly the same thing as depression, but certainly related – you say that low self esteem also has a very negative impact on health and on longevity. What is a person who, say who reads your book, what is your

recommendation if they do have low self esteem, how do you bootstrap yourself up from low?

Shealy: It's interesting that we find when people get their serotonin and beta endorphins up they begin to feel better about themselves as well. Self esteem, or lack of self esteem really is just one marker of depression, it's one aspect of depression. By boosting the neurochemical mechanism that makes you feel good, people begin to feel better about themselves. Obviously I do emphasise that you need to deal with what I call your unfinished business. Anything that makes you angry, guilty, depressed or anxious should be dealt with. But you've only got three solutions. I've been preaching this for over 35 years. You've got three possible solutions to something that bugs you: you can have a fight, an argument or a lawsuit to try to get the person to change; you can divorce those that you cannot tolerate – with joy, because if you divorce them with anger you are no better off; or you do what I call “go for sainthood” – accept and forgive those things you can't change.

Now that's easy, that's the left brain approach, but by using some of the right brain approaches – Gestalt techniques, psychosynthesis techniques, some of the Jungian symbology – we can help people use the right brain approach to get insight, and a single session of past life therapy often is a turning point for people.

Dr. Dave: That begins to touch on some other topics, like intuition and imagination, visualizations; so I guess the past life therapy really uses factors like intuition, imagination and visualization.

Shealy: Yes; of course I think everybody has intuition, and some of us develop it and use it spontaneously more than others. If you can “remember” what a rose looks like, if you can “remember” what a lemon tastes like, you've got imagination, and you can develop it. Of course I have worked with highly intuitive people who have specific intuitive skills, like Bob Lightman a physician who is one of the best medical diagnosticians; I have worked with Carolyn Myss for 23 years. Both of them can make a diagnosis with a high degree of accuracy without seeing the patient. Bob worked with a psychiatrist for three years, he had been influenced for three years sitting in his apartment making diagnoses on the psyche of Dr. Allison's patients.

Dr. Dave: Doing it remotely.

Shealy: He is so good, he could read your psyche with 96% accuracy

Dr. Dave: Now I've not heard of him, I've heard of Carolyn – is the name pronounced “Mase”? I've never known how to pronounce it – it's Myss.

Shealy: She pronounces it as if it was “Mace”.

Dr. Dave: OK. And you have co-authored some books with her, right?

Shealy: Yes we have written two books together, *The Creation of Health* and *Passageway to Transformation*.

Dr. Dave: OK. And what is the role of visualization in your work?

Shealy: I believe the most important thing is for people to learn to create positive images of what they want to accomplish. One of my favourite tools which I learned back in the early 1970s is autogenic training, and of course autogenic training is a superb mental left brain and right brain approach integrated. You use words but you also create images to reinforce the words. If you are saying my arms and legs are heavy and warm, you imagine the sun beaming down upon them. Autogenic training even as of 1969 had over 2,600 scientific references.

Dr. Dave: Interesting. Now I've been aware of it for some time but still it's one of those things that a lot of people have never heard of. Was it developed in Germany or in Austria?

Shealy: No it was in Germany, Johannes H. Schultz developed it. He wrote his first book in 1932.

Dr. Dave: Right, so it really goes back a ways. But he combined the techniques of visualization and deep relaxation, right?

Shealy: That's is correct; and there is excellent evidence, and published extensively that if people will just practice autogenic training for three to six months they can actually control about 80% of stress illnesses.

Dr. Dave: Yes I was intrigued by that in your book, because I had known about autogenic training for some time but I did not realize that it had been applied successfully to such a wide range of physical ailments.

Shealy: Yes one of our graduate students that passed through the professional psychology here did his doctoral dissertation using nothing but a twelve minute basic autogenic tape for fibromyalgia, and in one month had strikingly successful results. Of course I have used this for 34 years.

Dr. Dave: Is that a tape that is available on your website? I know you have a number of things.

Shealy: Yes I call it *Basic Shultz* to give credit to Dr. Shultz.

Dr. Dave: OK. I have at least one listener who wanted me to get somebody on to talk about energy psychology, and I think you probably fall in that realm.

Shealy: (laughing) Yes, this fall I'm going to the Energy Psychology Conference in Toronto.

Dr. Dave: Now I suspect many of my listeners have never heard the term "Energy Psychology", don't know what it would refer to; so give us a primer on this.

Shealy: Well of course everything is energy. We physically are bits and pieces if you will of condensed energy, both light and sound. So taking that beyond the physical fact, the physics fact of everything in nature, there are many techniques, such as reiki, all kinds of healing techniques like that; there are the rapid eye movement techniques that are used. We have done a lot of work with healers. I have demonstrated in 116 different people that a healer can send energy, healing energy whatever that means, from a distance up to 1,000 miles and strikingly effect the EEG.

Dr. Dave: I had not heard this.

You are also trained as an acupuncturist, is that right?

Shealy: That's right. I have practiced acupuncture since 1967, and acupuncture is a tremendous energy technique. Again as a neurosurgeon, and of course I also studied neurophysiology extensively – I almost got my Ph.D. in neurophysiology working with Sir John Eccles – then I thought that psychology as it was more important.

We are electrical and chemical beings. Everything in our body that takes place is the result of electrical chemistry, or chemical electricity. We send impulses because of movement of sodium and potassium, and calcium and magnesium, and that is energy that is basic chemical energy taking place in our bodies.

Of course we get blocks in those energies, because I think Wilhelm Reich had a lot of good stuff in his repertoire too. We have a lot of muscle tension. You know Reich said he had never seen anybody in the western world who had an unlocked pelvis. We tend to go around clenching our bodies because of fear, poor self esteem. I'm always with teenagers that I run into talking to them about their posture, because if you slouch you begin to create postural abnormalities that have physical reactions, and chemical reactions, and electrical reactions in the body. We now know that muscle tension can actually turn off the blood flow to organs inside the body. Reich of course believed that every illness was to a great extent the result of muscle tension cutting off blood flow and not getting enough oxygen.

Dr. Dave: For our listeners I should comment that Wilhelm Reich was one of the earlier disciples of Sigmund Freud, but at some point he went his own direction and really emphasised the body. So in a way he is the progenitor of an awful lot of this holistic work.

Shealy: He is, and of course he is certainly a progenitor of energy psychology, Neo-Reichian stuff especially – Bowen and other people like that have carried it on.

Dr. Dave: Right. Well I think we have touched on most of the points that I had in my notes here, I wonder if there is anything that I haven't asked you about that you want people to know?

Shealy: Well there are some other things that people need to think about.

We know that there are four habits that are absolutely crucial to basic health, and those four habits are: no smoking, a body mass index between 19 and 24, eating a minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, and exercising a minimum of 30 minutes three times a week.

Now of those four basic health habits – and actually the research on this came out only in last December, and it didn't make it into the book – but less than 3% of Americans have all those 4 habits. Now without those four habits you are not going to live a long time. The average American has a life that is shortened by 22 years, because of primarily obesity and smoking, but also inactivity which contributes to obesity. If people just had these habits, I believe within ten years the average life expectancy would go up ten or twelve years, and within twenty or thirty years average life expectancy would go up to 100.

Now a lot of people don't want to live to be 100, but that's because they think people get decrepit as they get older. Well I've known physicians who are 92 years of age, still practicing full time, and more active and alert than a lot of 60 year olds, or even 40 year olds, so we know it is possible.

My great grandmother at 101, when I last visited her was in her kitchen canning, getting ready for winter, and I said, Grandma how do you feel? And she said, "I feel just as good as I did when I was 16." To me that's normal, and that's healthy.

So I always knew as a child, after reading my great great grandfather's diary that I would live to be at least 100. I now believe I can live to 140. But in order to do that I not only have to have good health habits, I've got to keep my DHEA up – not by taking it but through natural means – and keep my calcitonin up so my skeleton doesn't deteriorate, and keep free radicals down. Those are the three things that I think are the most exciting aspects of my book to me. When I finished the research on all of those I knew that was the secret to extended life healthfully.

Dr. Dave: Well I tell you it is sure challenging me to get my level of physical exercise back up. I used to do a lot of bicycling and other forms of exercise, and I'll tell you I've gotten so sucked into the computer and podcasting, (laughing) and I'm sitting all the time.

Shealy: Well let me give you a suggestion.

Dr. Dave: OK.

Shealy: I do a lot of computer work also, I have a mini trampoline in front of my computer, and my computer is up on a shelf. So I work three to twelve hours a day at my computer, but I'm standing all the time, and because it's an elastic surface I have to move constantly.

Dr. Dave: So in other words, you are not necessarily bouncing up and down on the trampoline?

Shealy: No I'm just standing there moving, but if I have to wait, you know every once in a while you have to wait for 30 seconds, and I bounce during that time. It's a wonderful alternative to sitting all day.

Dr. Dave: I am going to have to give that some consideration (laughing).

Shealy: I actually get two hours of real exercise every day in addition to that. I can't imagine not doing it.

Dr. Dave: Yes I read your regimen in the book, it was pretty impressive. Would it be too rude of me to ask how old you are now?

Shealy: I'm 73. Interestingly I don't feel 16, I felt better at 26 than I did at 16, and I still feel 26.

Dr. Dave: And I invite people to read your book – that exercise regimen you describe is pretty impressive – and you are doing that now at 73, like 100 sit ups a day.

I am going to put a like to your book on the website, and also put a link to your website so that interested listeners can get a lot more information, because you've got a ton of information on your website. And I want to thank you for spending this time with us.

Shealy: Well thank you, and remember that they can sign up for my free email newsletter every week too.

Dr. Dave: OK, and how would they do that, is that on the website?

Shealy: Yes, just go to **www.normshealy.com** and they'll find me.

Dr. Dave: OK, great. Well thanks so much Norm.

Shealy: Thank you, and have a great day.