3 - A: “Co-Morbid” Conditions: Connections to Other Body Systems

“Comorbidity” is the medical term for conditions that co-occur with a primary or main diagnosis. Note that the word “morbid” in medicine refers to disease or disorder. Comorbidities are understood through the reductive models of science and medicine as “additional” conditions. But the fact that we are talking about connective tissue should suggest that these so-called comorbidities are likely manifestations of the same condition in different body systems rather than “additional” diseases – it’s all connected!

While different types of connective tissue variations produce different effects in different body systems, one thing all types of connective tissue variations have in common is that they affect many body systems in sometimes unexpected ways. But what are those systems? The list below briefly surveys the variety of systems that can be affected by variations of connective tissue and the “other” conditions people with connective tissue variations can have:

- Immune: Mast Cell Activation Syndrome, Immune Deficiencies, Autoimmune Disorders
- Neurological: Dysautonomias (like Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome–POTS); Dystonia, Nerve pain/damage, Neurodivergence (ADHD, Autism), Anxiety, and Clinician Associated Trauma
- Reproductive: Pregnancy risks, Hormone sensitive symptoms [link to menopause unit]; Endometriosis
- Gastrointestinal: Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Food Sensitivities, Delayed Gastric Emptying/Gastroparesis
- Sensory: Vision (high myopia), Hearing Loss, Poor Proprioception (body awareness)
- Cardiovascular System: Heart Murmur, Aneurysm, Venous Insufficiency/Blood Pooling
- Skeletal: Brittle Bones (prone to fracture), Joint Dislocations or Subluxations, Tendon/Ligament/Cartilage Tears

Because connective tissue connects, variations of connective tissue need care that is connected. People with connective tissue variations often benefit from holistic and integrative care. This becomes tricky. We often need prescription medications. The doctors most likely to be trained to think holistically about the connections between body systems are naturopathic, holistic, or functional medicine physicians. But, in many (though not all) parts of the world those kinds of physicians can’t prescribe pharmaceuticals. There are also many alternative treatments that seem

to benefit some people with variations of connective tissue. But without better research that takes these treatments seriously, it’s hard to say with good certainty which treatments are most effective and under which conditions.

Many people with connective tissue variations are on their own to navigate this complicated reality to find some relief for pain, fatigue, and other symptoms that cause suffering. And, this state of affairs leaves a lot of people with connective tissue variations vulnerable to scams and modern “snake oil.” Moreover, because mainstream medicine has often failed to provide care, some people with connective tissue disease have become so distrustful of mainstream medicine, they refuse pharmaceutical treatments that might in fact help them. This is why integrative medicine can be so helpful–it combines both alternative and mainstream medicine in the same treatment plan. But integrative medicine just isn’t accessible to everyone who might need it. This lack of access is driven partly by economics, partly by poor healthcare policy, and partly by the reductive model of science and medicine itself, as it often casts any alternative medical models as synonymous with “snake oil.”

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