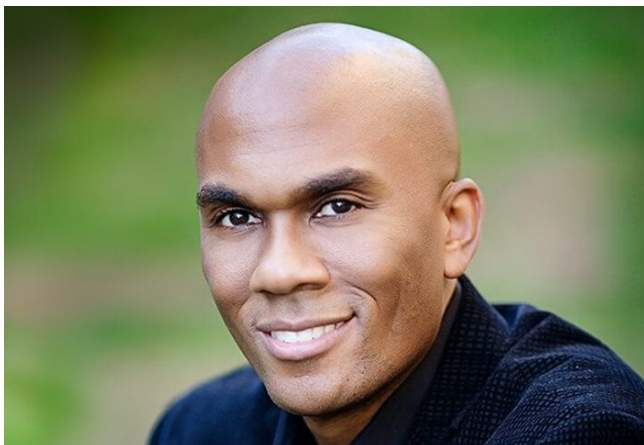


Why I Abandoned Traditional Cardiology to Become the “Healthy Heart Doc”

By Columbus Batiste, MD, FACC, FSCAI
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Spider-Man and Me: Parallel Tragedies

Spider-Man was my favorite superhero growing up. I'm not sure if I wanted to be Spider-Man because of the catchy theme song, his cool “spidey-sense,” his ability to climb walls, or his ability to web sling throughout the city. Whatever the reason, I identified with him. Spider-Man is still my favorite superhero today, but my adult admiration stems from my personal identification with his plight.

Believe it or not, the transformation of Peter Parker into Spider-Man is very similar to my own. In the comic books, Peter Parker became Spider-Man only after a family tragedy: by choosing not to use his powers, he inadvertently caused the death of his uncle Ben.

My metamorphosis from Dr. Columbus Batiste, board-certified interventional cardiologist, to Columbus Batiste, the “Healthy Heart Doc,” was equally traumatic. For years, I practiced medicine the way I had been trained. I focused primarily on the use of medications and procedures to treat disease states. Lifestyle intervention was an obligatory afterthought, and not a form of treatment.

The Heartbreak of Losing My Father

Being a product of this educational and belief system, I used the same methods when it came to my father. I encouraged him to use more and more medications and, as a result, watched him wither away. Not once did I, or the physicians who cared for him, address what I now know to have been the root cause: *poor nutrition*.

My father's health declined progressively during years of *medicating the symptoms* of poor nutrition instead of *correcting the root cause*. In 2010, my mother, siblings, and I watched him take his last breath. I was devastated. I had let him down when he needed me the most. All the words and gifts of gratitude I previously received from patients for “saving” their lives seemed to mock me.

Grief Becomes Action

Like Peter Parker, my grief turned to action—not against my dad's physician's but against his disease. I began to research and arm myself with knowledge of nutrition. Backed by the scientific research in *Reversing Heart Disease* (Dean Ornish), *The China Study* (T. Colin Campbell), *Eat to Live* (Joel Fuhrman) and *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease* (Caldwell Esselstyn), I was ready to fight the good fight. I also educated myself on stress reduction and trained myself in the ancient art of behavioral modification. I swore not to allow my father's death to be in vain.

During my life-changing transformation from traditional cardiologist to empowered Healthy Heart Doc, I realized that with great power comes great responsibility. I have changed my approach in the war against heart disease and its allies (diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, and obesity) by opting to battle with “forks over stents.”

Where I Am Now

By becoming a plant-based doctor and adopting this lifestyle, my work has become rewarding and has given me purpose (and dare I say, superpower!). I'm always so

(continued)

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excited when I hear a story of how a person’s life was changed by going plant-based.

I helped develop an Integrative Cardiovascular Disease program at Kaiser, which includes plant-based nutrition. I also created a “green” homework assignment for clinic and coronary artery bypass patients that includes the [Forks Over Knives](#) documentary and supporting books. Now, I am often gratified to hear physicians who were previously opposed to this diet tell me that they give their patients my “homework.”