Mercy’s new Integrative Medicine Center combines conventional medicine with evidence-based, complementary and alternative approaches to healing under the direction of Suzanne Bartlett, MD, FACOG.

“Mercy’s vision is to be a place where patients come to improve their health, not just a place to come when they’re sick. This mindset sets Mercy apart and I’m thrilled to join them in providing a new type of service to patients,” says Dr. Bartlett.

“Being able to offer evidence-based complementary and alternative therapies, in addition to conventional medicine, is a unique and natural approach to prevention, wellness and healing chronic issues. Integrative medicine blends different medicine systems from a research basis,” says Dr. Bartlett. Services include vitamin, supplement and herbal management; nutrition planning and education; mind-body techniques; aromatherapy; guided imagery; massage therapy; and HeartMath, a technology to reduce stress and anxiety.

“Integrative medicine does not take therapies at full value until there is evidence to back them up,” she emphasizes. “I will always continue to practice conventional medicine. I’m not at all adverse to pharmacological medicine and I don’t interfere with referring physicians’ treatment plans.”

Dr. Bartlett partners with patients (and their primary care providers) to identify the root of conditions and to develop a care plan to naturally optimize their health. “I put control back in the patient’s lap,” she says. “My patients are usually stressed, frustrated with weight gain, have difficulty sleeping… It’s the same recipe for illness over and over again. You have to break the cycle somewhere. So I ask them where they can break this cycle and we work on that together.”

Board certified in Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dr. Bartlett is finalizing a prestigious fellowship in integrative medicine with Dr. Andrew Weil at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine. In January 2014, she will be Iowa’s first and the area’s only University of Arizona fellowship-trained medical doctor practicing integrative medicine. Beyond her impressive credentials, Dr. Bartlett’s life experiences have fueled a passion for her work that sets her apart.

In her role as an OB-GYN, she frequently received questions from patients about supplements. Her interest was further sparked when her now 13-year-old son was diagnosed with autism just before his third birthday. Dr. Bartlett, former president of the Autism Society in Iowa, remembers, “I received a constant barrage of suggestions of things to try – like supplements, a gluten-free diet and others. I was firm then – and now – that I would never try anything with my son that wasn’t evidence-based.”

In 2009, her life took another turn when her non-smoking, 48-year-old husband, Dave, was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. “It was a huge blow, particularly because he took good care of himself,” she says. She began questioning why autism, cancer and other illnesses were rising.

A pivotal moment occurred in 2010 at the Planetree national convention, where she was honored with a Planetree Physician Champion Award. Founded by a patient, Planetree is a pioneer in personalizing, humanizing and demystifying healthcare. Mercy is a member of Planetree. While at the conference, Dr. Bartlett attended a session on integrative medicine presented by Dr. Weil.

“A light bulb went off and I decided to apply for a fellowship with him. I intuitively knew it was the thing to do,” she recalls. Her application was accepted in fall 2011, but she deferred the fellowship until February 2012 due to her husband’s illness. Unfortunately, that was even worse timing as her husband was in hospice by then.

Despite his challenges, like difficulty breathing and being on oxygen, Dr. Bartlett’s husband insisted on coming with her so she could start the fellowship. His daughter joined them as an opportunity to spend precious time together. Three weeks after their trip to Tucson, Dave passed away, knowing his wife was on her way to a new career path.

Good nutrition, quality sleep, exercising and preventive healthcare are important when fighting disease or trying to maintain health, says Dr. Bartlett. “The body has an innate ability to heal itself, especially when you take care of it,” she says.

The single, working mother of two admits that taking her own advice can be personally challenging. But she tries to follow doctor’s orders by getting enough sleep, practicing yoga, exercising and taking time for herself.

Mercy’s Integrative Medicine Center offers treatment and resource options for a variety of female and male conditions, including chronic disease; gynecologic and hormonal issues; mood disorders; digestive conditions; pelvic floor dysfunction; and cancer.

To make an appointment, call the Integrative Medicine Center at (319) 861-7832. A physician referral is not required.