

Conversation with Shonna Stokowski: The Gupta Brain Retraining Program for Long Covid

Interview by Dick Benson

Shonna Stokowski is a passionate advocate of the Gupta Retraining Program, after using it to completely reclaim her health and life in 2014. Prior to her recovery she was diagnosed with labels such as ME/CFS, POTS, MCS, mold sensitivity, Lyme, food sensitivities and others. She spent many years searching for solutions and implementing countless regimens, prior to the success with the Gupta Program.

*Shonna began the Gupta Coach Training in 2017 and became certified in March 2020. She has a health science background and graduated from the University of Alberta in 1993. She is a Heart Math Coach, a Neurolinguistic Programming coach and has her EFIT level one certification with Dr. Sue Johnson. She also draws inspiration from the work of Dr. Rick Hanson who is the creator of *Hardwiring Happiness* and Dr. Carolyn Leaf who is a Christian neuroscientist.*

Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal (IMCJ): Can you talk a little about your background and how you became acquainted with the Gupta Brain Retraining Program?

Mrs. Stokowski: I fell ill suddenly in 2008 and subsequently was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome / myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) and postural orthostatic tachycardia (POTS). I received other diagnoses over the following years. Prior to those health challenges, I was very athletic and passionate about my life. In hindsight, I realized that I did experience anxiety and was a perfectionist.

Anyone who has complex chronic illnesses knows that trying to figure out how to get well can be an exhausting rollercoaster. I traveled throughout the USA seeing medical and functional doctors for years, attempting to find a cure, and tried many treatments and protocols. Eventually after about eight years, I found the Gupta Program, which is an advanced neuroplasticity, brain retraining program for complex illness. I had been exposed to information from a cardiological and environmental medical clinic about the effectiveness of neuroplasticity in curing chronic illnesses. The program helped me completely regain my health, and to this day, I am so grateful.

Currently, neuroplasticity is more accepted and understood in the medical community, after a study on the Gupta Program in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine* in October 2020.

IMCJ: Do you primarily treat patients or practitioners who want to learn how to treat patients?

Mrs. Stokowski: Certified Gupta Coaches support people who are participating in the Gupta Program in regaining their health. Certification requires completion of a two-year training program. Most of the coaches have themselves recovered from a health condition using the Gupta Program, which is a unique circumstance because people who have such illnesses can feel very unacknowledged and misunderstood. I think that the most powerful part of a coach's job stems from the fact that people feel like they have found someone who understands how they feel and can also provide a solution to their problems. Some people can implement the Gupta Program and don't need a coach to get well. Coaching is optional.

Many people with long coronavirus disease (COVID) have been told many unhelpful things, such as: "it's all in your head"; "it's psychosomatic"; "you need to think positively and exercise"; or "no cure exists." As a result, they can feel defeated. Another large group of people with long COVID have caring healthcare providers who are doing all they can to help, but they just don't know what treatment to offer.

The hypothesis of the Gupta Program is that such illnesses are an innocent overreaction that happens in the brain, that the limbic brain and body go into an overprotective state. One of the most important things that coaches tell patients immediately is that they are innocent of any wrongdoing. The unconscious brain sometimes develops an overreaction, and the Gupta Program provides the recipe to interrupt it.

Beautiful and intelligent people, from all walks of life, take part in the program and get well. I feel very protective and compassionate toward people who have long COVID or any complex health condition. Often they can feel judged and hopeless, and their self-confidence can be altered. It's a large accomplishment for people to regain their health and lives with a program they implement themselves. They do so to regain their health, but the program gives them much more in the process.

IMCJ: Can you talk a little about long-haulers, starting with the issues that people have after they have been treated for COVID initially and the virus is no longer active in them.

Mrs. Stokowski: Some people question if they still have the virus in them and can feel concerned about that possibility, but as they start to regain their health using the Gupta Program, that concern is put to rest. Hundreds of people with long COVID have completely regained their health after taking part in the Gupta Program. It's miraculous to watch and such a privilege to be a part of their healing journeys.

IMCJ: Do you think that people's mental states or how they think about themselves can impact how they recover from COVID?

Mrs. Stokowski: Mental state is one aspect that coaches address in the Gupta Program, but the brain retraining is far more than just changing the mental state; it's actually neurally rewiring the brain.

IMCJ: Can explain more about that rewiring? I'm not sure what you mean by that term.

Mrs. Stokowski: Most people with long COVID are innocently and unconsciously being sent danger signals by their brains. For example, they question whether they will ever get better. Of course, someone who is unwell wants to be well, but their concern can keep the sympathetic nervous system in overdrive. They don't access the parasympathetic nervous system, which is "the rest and digest" part of the nervous system. The Gupta Program holistically and compassionately teaches people how to retrain their minds to reverse these unconscious danger signals and calm their nervous systems so that the body can be supported in healing.

The process is cutting-edge neuroplasticity. The Gupta Program's developer, Ashok Gupta, has meticulously researched the most powerful and effective strategies to give to people. I encourage everyone reading this interview to go to the Gupta Program's website, <https://www.guptaprogram.com/>, and read "The Hypothesis" to understand more clearly what happens in the brain and body that keeps creating symptoms. It also shows how people can interrupt that process with self-directed brain retraining, to create permanent health.

IMCJ: How quickly can patients see results?

Mrs. Stokowski: Most people start to see results right away if they incorporate the program fully. Some, like myself, integrate the program more slowly, and it takes longer. It's highly individual.

The Gupta Program provides all the needed, self-directed neuroplasticity tools and exercises. The person

An Overview of The Gupta Program

Describing the patient process.

The Gupta Program is available online as an interactive video program designed with chronic illness in mind. Patients can sign up for a free 28 day trial to sample the program, and if they choose to purchase the program, an accompanying manual and mind map are sent in the post. Patients follow the 15 interactive video sessions at their own pace, and attend weekly webinars with the Founder, Ashok Gupta. There is also a supportive online forum, as well as trained Gupta Program Coaches who can support the healing journey one-on-one.

What is the neuroplasticity program

The neuroplasticity program aims to retrain the brain out of conditioned immune and nervous system responses, that were previously conditioned by traumatic neurological events. It is hypothesized that this may involve projections from the pre-frontal cortex down to the amygdala and insula, as well as inhibitory effects of the amygdala on the periaqueductal gray. Initially the patient focuses on relaxation techniques such as breathing and meditation which helps make the brain more "neuroplastic". Then a person focuses on the main core brain retraining which involves recognizing danger signals from the unconscious brain, and sending back safety signals. The program is a minimum 6 month program.

Results from using the program to treat Long COVID.

We recently clinical audit of our patients was conducted by AB Research Consulting. These are the results:

- Before using the Gupta Program, just 13% of those suffering from long-haul COVID reported positive health and functioning. After using it, almost half (47%) reported positive health and functioning.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of those with long-haul COVID reported at least some positive improvement in their health and functioning after using the Gupta Program.
- More than eight-in-ten (82%) say the Gupta Program is effective in reducing the symptoms of long-haul COVID.

Almost nine-in-ten (89%) respondents with long-haul COVID say they would recommend the Gupta program to someone else.

incorporates the program into his or her life at a speed and comfort level that is right for him or her. Ashok Gupta provides weekly live webinars for people participating in the program. These are included in the program's cost and are incredibly supportive, informative, and inspiring.

Ashok has 25 years of experience researching and applying self-directed neuroplasticity to complex chronic health conditions. People who are healing from long COVID spontaneously ask to speak during the webinars and share how they are using the program to get well. Many were completely house bound initially and are currently back to work and living a normal life again. When other patients hear about their journeys, they know they can do it too. It's so inspiring and wonderful!

IMCJ: Is stress management one of the aspects of the Gupta Program? Would you consider the program to be a lifestyle intervention?

Mrs. Stokowski: Stress management is just part of it, and lifestyle intervention is a small part of it but not the core. As indicated previously, the Gupta Program uses cutting-edge neuroscience and doesn't just talk about the brain's neurobiology. The program intentionally and experientially applies that knowledge to benefit the patient.

When people feel embarrassed, their faces can flush, and if they think about sucking on a lemon, they may salivate. When people smell fresh bread or the ocean, their bodies may relax, and they can feel calm. These are simple examples that indicate the existence of a brain-body response or interaction.

IMCJ: How long do you typically see a patient? How long does a treatment plan last?

Mrs. Stokowski: The length varies. The program seems to work very effectively for long COVID, better than for any other condition in my opinion. I see mostly patients with long COVID, and I am so inspired at how quickly they can regain their health. Some people are literally better in a few months. For others, the time depends on what's going on in their lives. Because the program includes neurolinguistic programming, it requires people to shift their perspectives.

IMCJ: Do you find that people investigate the program because they don't really have other options?

Mrs. Stokowski: I don't know what's happening in the world that so many people are becoming aware of the Gupta Program. Many more doctors may be recommending the program, and also the positive results may have become known. I'm so excited about it because most people, like myself, wouldn't consider a neuroplasticity program within the first year of being diagnosed with CFS/ME or fibromyalgia or other complex chronic

condition. Such people spend years and thousands of dollars trying treatments and traveling all over the place before they consider a neuroplasticity program. Many long-COVID individuals are open to a neuroplasticity program right away. That's wonderful, because they don't have to go for years and years suffering with the condition. They find a cure that is permanent as well, in my opinion. The program gets to the root problem.

IMCJ: Do you find that practitioners are open to the program as well?

Mrs. Stokowski: Yes. Many of the long-COVID people that I see have been referred to the Gupta Program by a doctor, a combination of functional medicine doctors and medical doctors. The study previously mentioned on the effectiveness of the Gupta Program may have been the catalyst or source of information for doctors. I'm not sure.

IMCJ: What do you look forward to with the Gupta Program? What are you hoping to do? Everyone hopes that COVID will disappear, and maybe in a few years, no more people will become COVID long-haulers, but it's not likely. Before COVID, what were your thoughts about the Gupta Program? Where did you see it going?

Mrs. Stokowski: Well, I love that question. Years ago, I heard Ashok Gupta state that his goal was that it would become the go-to treatment in doctors' offices when people present with complex chronic illnesses, that people don't have to go for years or decades trying many treatments. I can remember thinking that that will never happen, but it's starting to happen. I've joined his vision, and believe that it's possible. Because I personally coach many people who fully recover from illnesses like long COVID, I am filled with passion to educate others who are suffering needlessly.

I also would like to educate people about the importance of allowing time to recover, if they get COVID-19, so that they don't potentially develop long COVID. I'm thinking about a number of people in New York who developed long COVID in 2020. They all stated that they felt like they had mostly recovered from COVID but that they went back to their normal busy routines too soon. Some were attending protests or rallies and went into a stressed state, and then they crashed with long COVID.

It's so important that if people get COVID that they take the time to get better and relax, before going back to their normal routines.

IMCJ: Recruitment obviously isn't an issue. People are finding you. How do you talk to somebody whom you just can't take as a patient because you don't have the time? Can you provide them with resources until they can get a coach?

Mrs. Stokowski: I am often at capacity with Gupta Program clients, but many other certified Gupta coaches are available. They are incredible at guiding and individualizing the program for an individual's unique circumstance. The program also offers group coaching, which is very informative, connecting, and supportive. It's not a necessity to have a coach. All the needed tools and information are offered in the Gupta Program itself.

As mentioned previously, the weekly live webinars allow people to ask questions and share their recovery for others to be inspired and get tips on their own recovery.

People can feel overwhelmed when they start. After they connect with an individual coach or a group, the coach simplifies the process; he or she looks at the big picture of what the program does with the brain, and it makes the process attainable. It makes sense. "Yeah, I can do this" is what I hear a lot.

If you know of anyone that has long COVID, please encourage them to go to <https://www.guptaprogram.com/>. The website provides testimonials as well.



The advertisement features the Global Healing logo, a stylized green tree with roots, centered at the top. Below the logo is the text "GLOBAL HEALING®" in green. Underneath is the slogan "Trusted for Purity & Potency for Over 20 Years" in green. To the left and right of the central text are images of various products: a bottle of Triple Activated Vitamin B12 5000 mcg (with blueberries and an orange slice), a bottle of Plant-Based Zinc (with orange slices and a strawberry), a bottle of Plant-Based Vitamin C (with orange slices), and a bottle of Oxygen-Based Oxy-Powder Natural Digestive Cleanse (with a raspberry). Below the slogan are three green leaf icons followed by the text: "Sold in Over 30 Countries", "High Customer Purchase Rate", and "cGMP Manufacturing Facility". At the bottom of the central text area are three circular icons: "USDA ORGANIC", "VEGAN FRIENDLY", and "GMO FREE". At the very bottom, a green banner contains the text "Now sold through Threshold, Palko, Emerson and Lotus Light!". Below this banner is a disclaimer: "These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease."

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