

why MEDICAL DOCTORS

B\ Bobbie Lieberman

G o i n g Natural

For most, there is a turning point,
and then there is no turning back

Holistic medicine. Alternative or complimentary therapies. Collaborative medicine. You've probably heard one or more of these terms, and chances are you've even sampled them. They all describe elements of a new model of medicine that is spreading like wildfire across the country—*integrative medicine*'.

What are some of the differences between Western medicine and integrative medicine and why are physicians "going natural" in record numbers? To learn more about this emerging model of healthcare, we interviewed several physicians—and even a few veterinarians—who have incorporated one or more "alternative" approaches into their practices. Their responses offered some key insights into the phenomenon of integrative medicine and revealed several consistent themes:

- all were conventionally trained in their fields of expertise, and most had the experience of encountering a mentor in their new field
- all became dissatisfied with what they saw as the ineffectiveness of Western medicine to help people with chronic diseases
- all strongly favor "integrating" alternative therapies with more conventional approaches rather than rejecting Western medicine
- all fully engage the patient's body, mind and spirit in the healing process and focus on *creating health* rather than managing disease
- all remain open to actively learning and adding new healing tools to their practice.

Our Western healthcare paradigm was developed around the "disease model" or "germ theory" of medicine: that is, the belief that disease is caused by invasion of a single agent. And, the reasoning goes, it's the doctor's job to identify the invader and shoot it down, usually with a drug or surgery. The doctor is the white knight, sweeping in to cure, while the patient passively awaits the outcome. The evolving field of integrative medicine doesn't reject drugs or surgery; In fact, "technology is beautiful." asserts Gayle Madeleine Randall, MD, a partner at the Malibu Health and Rehabilitation

Center north of Los Angeles. "We need [Western medicine]" for emergency care and acute conditions. "But in our Western

practices, we began honoring only the technology, and forgot to honor the energy and the person, and include the technology for balance, that's a beautiful approach."

Continues Randall: "The doctor doesn't have all the answers: we're just helpers. We just work here. I don't want [my patients] to think I'm the one who is curing them. They are really responsible for their own healing. When they engage themselves in that process, true healing occurs."

Some of the best-known alternative therapies include acupuncture, chiropractic, herbal medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, homeopathy and osteopathy.

Others, such as Reiki, Feldenkrais, cranial sacral therapy, bioenergetics and

radionics are less well-known, and even downright obscure.

But well-known or not, we're seeking them out in record numbers. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, one in three Americans have sampled alternative medicine and, in one year spent an estimated \$10.3 million on such therapies—as much as was spent on

hospitalization. Yet until recently, few consumers informed their regular physicians of their visits.

Since 1993, alternative medicine has moved steadily out of the shadows into the light of acceptance. "It's picking up so fast—people are demanding it," observes Elizabeth Chen Christenson, MD, whose Chi Medical Center opened two years ago in Northwest Ohio. On the

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In her practice, she has found acupuncture useful for pain relief—for conditions such as neck and back pain, neuralgia and also asthma, allergies, menstrual problems and even depression. But pain relief is usually only the start of healing.

"There is usually a deeper problem involved with any complaint, but especially with conditions such as fibromyalgia or autoimmune diseases. I talk to my patients about their lifestyle—smoking, diet, emotions. Then I encourage them to seek healthful changes." She has studied an emotional stress release technique to further support

her patients in making the necessary changes for true healing. Her patients are very open to making such changes, she reports.

Where a conventional physician might simply refer a depressed woman in pain to a psychiatrist, who will prescribe an antidepressant such as Prozac, Christenson simply looks at them and says, "Your agony is real. It's not all in your head—I understand. There could be a chemical imbalance that is affected by the emotional blockage.' They usually start crying at this point. That's the beginning of healing process—acceptance and release.

Dr. Wu, the Eastern door opened up for me again. I had come full circle, back to my roots as well as the future of collaborative medicine. For me, this was the living embodiment of 'yin-yang'—the perfect balance. It was the turning point."

She studied acupuncture and eventually persuaded her more conservative husband, an anesthesiologist, to go through the acupuncture training and certification at UCLA. Now she sees an average of 14 patients per day in her office at CHI (Comprehensive Health Innovations) Medical Center in Maumee, Ohio, of which she is founder and medical director. She spends 30 to 40 minutes with each patient discussing lifestyle, emotions and relationships.

An important part of the art of healing—and a big difference between Eastern and Western medicine—is that "the practitioner has to have a healthy perspective. Each doctor must be open to the flow of healthy energy in mind, body and spirit." She points to the demanding initiation of residency to which American physicians are subjected—long stretches of dealing with life-and-death situations without sleep. "It's a very

West Coast, Randall has observed a similar shift in the American public—"they seem much more open than many doctors are!"

Agrees New York physician Igor Ostrovsky, MD, who was trained in acupuncture in his native Russia, "Medicine in America is changing radically toward alternative therapies." Until 1992, most American physicians rejected these approaches. Acupuncture was introduced into the Soviet mainstream in 1957, when Russia sent six professors of medicine to study acupuncture in China.

Today, the mood is changing rapidly. We interviewed five practitioners of integrative medicine from coast to coast, to learn why they made the shift from standard medicine to a more holistic practice. In their stories you will find what it is to be a healer. They have impeccable credentials, rigorous training. For some, the turning point was as brilliant as a light bulb going off. For others, it was a gradual process.