HEALING WITH INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

By Elaine Moore

Integrative medicine refers to the practice of incorporating alternative medical therapies into conventional or Western medical regimens or to the simultaneous use of conventional and alternative medical treatments by medical practitioners. An example would be a physician who recommends both prescription medications and acupuncture or dietary supplements as part of his patients’ treatment plans. Integrative medicine has been used in Europe for many years although it is a relatively new concept in the United States.

Focus of Integrative Medicine

Integrative medicine focuses on wellness, health promotion, and the healing process. The steps to healing typically include detoxification, regeneration, and nutrition. Treatments are specific for the individual depending on his lifestyle, other health conditions, his general constitution, emotional state, exposure to stress, and diet. In an ideal integrative program, the immediate symptoms would be reduced quickly by using conventional therapies, usually prescription medications, and the root of the illness would be addressed and healed with alternative medicine.

Because of the benefits offered by both medical disciplines, many integrative clinics have been established in the last decade where patients can receive conventional treatments such as physical therapy and alternative treatments such as massage or craniosacral therapy in the same office setting. In cities where integrative physicians aren't available, a conventional practitioner might work closely together with a naturopath or doctor of traditional Chinese medicine to develop an integrative treatment approach.

Federal Programs

In October 1998 the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services in Bethesda, Maryland created a special branch dedicated to studying the effects of complementary and alternative medicine. This branch is called the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM).

NCAAM has four primary areas of focus: advancing scientific research in alternative and complementary medicine; training CAM researchers and encouraging experienced researchers to study CAM; sharing news and information through an information clearinghouse, continuing medical education programs, and on their website; supporting the integration of proven CAM therapies. NCCAM regularly conducts clinical trials that study the effects of various complementary medicines on autoimmune disorders. It shares the results of these trials in articles submitted to medical journals and published on their website. NCCAM also maintains a database (CRISP) of current publications related to the study of alternative medicine.
Available Resources

In the early 1990s few integrative resources existed. One of the best known was Dr. Rudolph Ballentine’s clinic in New York City, described in his popular book *Radical Healing*, which was first, released in 1998. Ballentine’s interest in Eastern medical traditions led him to India and Asia where he learned Eastern medical traditions firsthand. When he returned to the United States he incorporated these treatments into his medical practice. In his book he describes the use of complementary alternative therapies including homeopathy, Ayurveda, traditional Chinese Medicine, and herbal medicine.

Today, programs in Integrative Medicine are offered at most of the major medical schools in the United States. And most large cities have one or more integrative clinics. The famous Columbia University cardiovascular surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz has written several books advocating an integrative approach to total health and longevity.

Resources:


National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health

Rudolph Ballentine, Radical Healing-Integrating the World’s Great Therapeutic Traditions to Create a New Transformative Medicine, 2000, first reprint.

Sue Kovach, Dr. Mehmet Oz, Global Medicine, Life Extension Foundation Journal, September, 2008: 57-66.