

# Different Drum

## Alternative Medicine Gains Respectability

by Lorri Lagorin

*(Editor's Note. This is the first in a two-part series which will address alternative medicine and some of the treatment options available in Tulsa.)*

To some it may conjure images of dimly lit rooms filled with the pungent smell of incense, potions and herbs being doled out by a long-bearded Chinese man, but to a growing number of Americans, alternative medicine means relief from chronic pain and suffering.

Alternative medicine, which is used to classify a large number of healing disciplines outside of mainstream medicine, is not a new phenomenon. Though the philosophy behind alternative medicine may be relatively new to the American culture, it has ancient roots many of the currently most popular of which come from the Orient, each discipline of which striving to restore a sense of balance and homeostasis to the body.

In the past, traditional medicine has been quick to dismiss many of the healing powers the various alternative medicine disciplines claim to have. However, benefits of alternative medicine, especially in the area of pain relief, are becoming increasingly accepted. Funding for research in alternative medicine, though limited, has become available through the National Institutes of Health, Department of Alternative Medicine. Some hospitals are even offering therapeutic massage and acupuncture as part of their treatment options, and some insurances now cover the cost of acupuncture therapy.

Although it is quite difficult to find MDs or DOs who will go on record supporting the development of alternative methods of healing, they're out there. Many are beginning to look at these techniques to complement, if not (in some instances) replace traditional methods of science. Indeed, Georgetown University recently founded a center for the study and practice of alternative medicine.

Practitioners of alternative medicine feel this newfound interest lends credibility to their fields, which they feel can work together with the medical profession. "Those of us in alternative medicine see it as tandem to medicine, complementary (to what medical doctors are doing), not in lieu of, but in support of what they do," says Denise Rodgers, Association for the Development of Mind/Body Potential, a nonprofit organization that specializes in research and treatment involving the mind as a powerful tool to balance the body.

Rodgers has been involved in the mind/body field for the past 14 years. It has just been in the past four years she has been approaching disease in her work. She has helped conduct pilot projects in the medical field teaching people who suffer from multiple sclerosis to use their mind to help their bodies heal and overcome pain. She is currently working on programs for people with heart disease and cancer.

Though the scientific research can be tedious, Rodgers feels it is important to conduct this type of research. "It's the only way the scientific community will come to realize the tremendous benefits alternative medicine has to offer."

Consumers have been much quicker to accept alternative medicine practices than the medical community. "Consumers are really putting their fist down hard," says Rodgers. They want to take control of their health and their medical care. "(Traditional medicine) is not winning the war against major diseases like AIDS, heart disease, and cancer," and it's time to try something new.

### A Brave New Journey to Healthville

"It's very exciting to watch the whole movement...We are talking about a life choice, and it's a journey, a very alive journey about waking up," says Lynda Jacobs, owner of Creating New Pathways, which specializes in massage and teaching in the mind/body field. Jacobs was also the founder 15 years ago of Center Works, another alternative medicine facility in Tulsa.

People usually come to Jacobs when "something isn't working." They have chronic pain or illness, or emotional problems in their lives. Most have tried a myriad of treatment, with little to no success. They are looking for a "quick fix" to make their lives better.

"I used to think that's what it was all about," she

says of the "quick-fix" belief. But in her work, she focuses on the deeper issues that have caused the symptoms. As in most of the alternative medicine fields, she believes much pain and suffering is caused by being out of balance, or out of sync with your body.

"Most people don't want anything to do with their own bodies. I teach them to live in their own bodies again, not just from the head, but from their whole body. It's absolutely amazing to watch someone rediscovering living in his own body."

Much of her work involves releasing and redirected energy through touch and massage. She works with her clients to develop an inner balance through acceptance of a complete realm of emotions, feelings, and physical being. She does not call what she does "therapy," but she does believe it can help speed up the treatment given by medical doctors and therapists.

Xerlan Geiser, director of The Massage Therapy Institute of Oklahoma, a state-licensed vocational school and clinic which teaches and practices a wide range of alternative medicine, including massage and aroma therapy, says the benefits of massage can incorporate a lot of different lifestyles. Pregnant women, athletes and the elderly, can all benefit from the power of massage.

As in most alternative medicine, listening to the client is one of the most important parts of the process. She listens to what the client is saying about himself, her life, his environment, and to what her body is saying. From there, Geiser is able to provide massage and other elements that help the body heal itself.

Massage is not dangerous, she says. But it is important, as it is in any of the alternative medicine fields, to be certain the practitioner is qualified and trained to provide the services they are offering. A bad massage might leave you sore, like you have over exercised, but a good massage is on the "edge of the therapeutic realm. It hurts good, but there is never pain."

"We don't crack bones, there's no needles, no invasive surgery," but the benefits of massage do affect the entire system. Through massage, she is able to help in areas such as chronic pain, low back pain, stress and stress-related illnesses and soft tissue problems. She also participated in the multiple sclerosis research Rodgers took part in. Other scientific research conducted by the NIH showed daily massage reduced patients blood pressure levels by three points a day. By the end of the study, 40 percent of the participants had significantly lowered their blood pressure.

"We are on the

fringe of the health care field, but we know we're really helping people," Geiser says.

### It's All Natural

Another Tulsa facility which offers a wide range of alternative medicine and clinical services is The Natural Healing and Wellness Center. On staff are acupuncturists, herbalists, hands-on healers, clinical psychologists, and clinical nutritionists, as well as people versed in the mind/body field, yoga and Tai Chi, an alternative medicine form dating back to a sect of ancient Chinese people.

Tai Chi focuses on very specific movements to create vital energy and proper energy flow so the body can start taking care of itself.

Director Tim Collins feels the diversity in his organization lends itself to helping people achieve a balance in their lives.

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