



THE NEXT

Scientists and physicians are updating their skills by investigating ancient medical practices.

FRONTIER

Breathe deeply. Hold it. Exhale slowly. Focus on a word, place or object that calms you. Repeat for 15 minutes.

Done? You've just participated in a condensed form of meditation and are now among millions who have used a form of complementary medicine.

While it goes by many names — alternative, holistic, natural and integrative — complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is the comprehensive term used by professionals. For the purpose of medical use, all fall under a simple definition: anything that is not formally taught in medical school is considered a form of complementary medicine. But that definition is being altered as medical schools like SIU incorporate CAM topics as electives or optional courses in their standard curricula.

Many of the practices included in CAM, such as acupuncture, yoga, herbal therapies and meditation, have been in use for centuries. They are used to treat headaches, heart disease, skin infections, cancer, stroke, diabetes and hay fever to name only a few.

Since its initial mainstream popularity in the 1960s, CAM has enjoyed a surge in use in the past decade. In 1997, Americans spent an estimated \$27 billion on complementary medicine treatments.

With natural treatments becoming a significant part of people's health-care regimens, a new question arises: Should such therapies be accepted into the practice of Western medicine?

Scientists and physicians all over the world are working to answer this question, including those at SIU School of Medicine.

"CAM will be integrated into our practice of medicine," believes Sharon Hull, M.D., assistant professor of family and community medicine and assistant dean of student affairs at the School of Medicine's Carbondale campus, who also is a longtime advocate of some CAM therapies. "But it won't supersede traditional practices. It will be included as an additional tool."

Dr. Hull leads a task force of SIU faculty, researchers, practitioners and residents who are taking a comprehensive look at how the School can synthesize CAM into its three-fold mission of education, research and service.

SIU already is incorporating pieces of CAM as food-for-thought for physicians, researchers and medical students. Jim Harris of Springfield College in Illinois lectured on the health benefits of music therapy during the annual Emmet Pearson, M.D. summer lecture series; SIU researcher Laura Murphy, Ph.D., has been studying the benefits of ginseng root on breast cancer patients; medical students ponder the emotional and spiritual needs of patients in Empathy 101, a voluntary class; and last spring three medical students observed acupuncture practices in China as part of SIU's Norma Wylie Scholarship, which aims to sensitize students to the health practices of other countries.

In September 2000, complementary medicine took the spotlight as the subject of one of the School's Grand Rounds lectures, given by Dr. Hull. Dave Steward M.D., chair of SIU's Department of Internal Medicine, was impressed with her balanced, straight-forward, evidence-based approach to the sometimes controversial subject.

"Physicians have to approach alternative medicine using the same standards as we use to evaluate any other treatment — based on the evidence," notes Dr. Steward, who concedes the benefits of a few complementary remedies such as zinc for colds and St. John's wort for mild depression, but still considers himself on the outskirts of acceptance. "Dr. Hull presented a model of the way our students should think about it."

The complementary medicine explosion shows no signs of slowing down. It has evolved over thousands of years and is making its way from the edge of Western medicine to perhaps one day becoming an integrated part of medical education and practice.

The following pages highlight only a few of the numerous CAM projects SIU physicians and researchers are carefully studying and applying in an effort to help answer the questions about complementary medicine — distinguishing the useful from the useless therapies and integrating effective CAM into existing practices as additional treatment options.

Whether complementary medicine is just a passing fad or will be combined with modern therapies, the bottom line is that what concerns patients concerns physicians. SIU physicians are listening to their patients and preparing themselves for the next frontier in medicine. ■

For additional stories on complementary and alternative medicine topics see the following issues of Aspects magazine: vol. 22, 4; vol. 23, 1; vol. 23, 3; and vol. 23, 4.

SIU Electives in Complementary and Alternative Medicine

ACUPUNCTURE

For four weeks, students visit the Department of Acupuncture Outpatient Clinic at SIU's sister school, Sun Yat Sen University of Medical Sciences in Guangzhou, China, where they study acupuncture as a treatment and anesthetic, as well as acupressure.

ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS OF HEALING

This tutorial places "modern" medicine in historical and anthropological contexts and studies the characteristics of major and minor healing systems. Students gain insight into why patients use complementary medical therapies.

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

Using a "journal club" format, students review the current literature to evaluate the use of medicinal plants as a form of alternative therapy for various diseases. They study the efficacy, side effects, and compliance issues of CAM therapies compared to Western treatments.

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Held at SIU's Carbondale campus, this non-clinical elective educates students about the impact of complementary therapies on patients. Using lectures, small group discussions with peers and practitioners, site visits and workshops, the course covers a broad range of topics including therapeutic touch, herbal therapies, reiki, chiropractic, massage therapy, meditation and guided imagery.

LAKOTA CULTURE: A PERSPECTIVE OF HEALING

To understand how the philosophy of a culture can impact the practice of medicine, students travel to the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota where they attend Lakota gatherings and ceremonies, interact with Lakota elders and observe Lakota ceremonies and healing practices.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Helping patients effectively manage their stress is the goal of this elective. Using didactic, problem-based and experiential learning techniques, students review stress-management techniques, nutrition and clinical research and practice.