

## Explore Total Wellness; How East Meets West for Your Continued Success



It seems no matter who you speak to, they have a complaint about our health care system. While cost is definitely the #1 issue, it is clear that our system has also become a reactive one, addressing problems as they arise instead of focusing on prevention. And that, simply put, is the major difference between Eastern and Western medicine. Let's spend some time defining the Eastern and Western medicine concepts.

Dr. Ka-Kit Hui, director of the UCLA Center for East-West Medicine, uses the term 'health-disease continuum' to describe the differences. At one end of the spectrum is feeling great, wellness/absence of disease, and minor symptoms, while on the other end, multiple/chronic symptoms, acute/advanced disease and terminal stage/death appear.

Eastern medicine addresses the former through maintenance of health and promotion of wellness, while Western(biomedical) care treats the other. The treatment of serious illness, especially chronic care, is costly, estimated at 75% of all medical expenses. That is just one factor that has many people looking to alternative medicine for results.

How do we address this imbalance? How do we transform our healthcare system to reduce costs and provide better health for everyone? The solution may be integrative medicine, a cost-effective remedy to patch the holes in our current health delivery system while controlling medical costs.

There has been some confusion between the terms "integrative medicine (IM)" and "complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)". Dr. Andrew Weil, director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, is the world's leading proponent of IM. He insists the terms are not the same as CAM uses nonconventional modalities and therapies that are excluded from traditional Western medicine.

Integrative medicine can be looked at as a marriage between conventional medicine and other healing methods that utilizes the best, scientifically supported therapies of both systems. The ultimate goal is to get the patient better through the use of safe, effective, and less-invasive means whenever possible.

According to Dr. Weil, “integrative medicine is healing-oriented medicine that takes account of the whole person (body, mind and spirit), including all aspects of lifestyle. It emphasizes the therapeutic relationship [between patient and physician] and makes use of all appropriate therapies, both conventional and alternative.”

Many of the therapies used by Eastern or Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) have been around for centuries. History records the use of acupuncture as far back as the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, as well as massage (tui na), herbal and dietary therapies and more.

TCM is based on our body’s vital energy (qi or ch’i) which flows throughout via channels called meridians. Using the meridians, our qi can reach all the organs of our body. Treatment is delivered by accessing the meridians and acupressure points appropriate to the illness. Very little, if any, scientific research has been done to substantiate the basis for these treatments which has led to much skepticism about their validity.

Although much more research needs to be conducted, there seems to be more than enough documentation of success with various TCM methods. Joint pain relief, migraine suppression, increased flexibility are just a few areas where combining TCM with Western medicine has produced better results than either one alone. Case after case records success when all hope had gone.

I am living proof of this. Back in my college days, I sustained a serious ankle injury while playing basketball which required physical therapy to heal. This was only one of the many times I sustained a sports-related injury so I had a lot of scar tissue.

Fast forward 40 years, still active, I developed tendonitis in both Achilles tendons. My right Achilles, the one I had PT on back in college, was the worst by far. Scar tissue had accumulated producing a large bump on the tendon.

I went to see my orthopedist (Western medicine) who told me my only option was to have surgery which would be excruciatingly painful and require 4-6 months to heal. He didn’t recommend I go through that and, no surprise, I agreed! All I could do was get some more PT and take painkillers. Not a happy compromise.

In the meantime, my chiropractor (TCM) suggested I speak with the acupuncturist (also TCM) who shared her office space to see if she could help me. I explained the situation and asked if she could do anything about the scar tissue. Her response, "Absolutely, we'll get rid of the scar tissue within a few months." With nothing to lose, I tried it.

After just a few sessions, the pain level was much reduced. And as promised, the lump of scar tissue on my tendon disappeared over a short period of time. Needless to say, I am now a big fan of acupuncture. I've even had some done for my back pain and to help with migraine symptoms.

Everyone is different and I certainly can't say that you'll have the results I had, but the use of both Western and Eastern medicine together should be evaluated and not dismissed out of turn. You never know when someone's life may depend on a cooperative joint therapy effort.

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