

Alternative Medicine Goes Mainstream

Studies are now showing that diet and lifestyle are among the most effective cures for some of our worst ailments. Our Canadian National Health-care system is primarily a disease-care system costing tax payers over \$148 billion/yr. Heart disease, diabetes, cancer and obesity account for a majority of the cost. These conditions are largely preventable and somewhat treatable with diet and lifestyle counseling. It is hard for us to believe that simple choices we make in our diet, exercise, the way we respond to stress and the quality of our personal relationships have everything to do with the strength of our immune system and physical well being.

A 2004 study followed 30,000 people on six different continents and found that a change in diet and lifestyle could prevent over 90% of heart disease. A major shift in the health care system would be required to place a large part of the focus on prevention as well as treatment. This change would pay off in the long run saving many lives not to mention billions of taxpayer dollars.

Natural therapies are becoming increasingly popular amongst Canadians. Fifty-four percent of Canadians surveyed in 2006 reported using at least one Alternative health care provider according to the report "Complimentary and Alternative medicine in Canada". Acupuncture, Acupressure, Chinese Herbal Medicine, Chiropractic, Hypnotherapy, Homeopathy, Nutrition, Massage, Meditation, Physical Fitness, Reiki, Tai Chi, and Yoga are all growing in popularity. Many of these modalities are now scientifically documented to be not only medically effective, but also cost effective.

Research shows an increasing demand for healthcare that recognizes and validates a mind, body, spirit connection, as well as an increasing dissatisfaction with 10 minute doctor visits, quick fix prescriptions and limits of Western healthcare. In response to a steady growth in patients turning to complementary and alternative medicine, many medical schools are now incorporating courses in Alternative Medicine into the standard curriculum, allowing Medical Doctors to have a basic understanding of the different modalities available and how they can compliment Western Medical care.

Alternative medicine can be effectively integrated into the Western medical world by taking a more Holistic approach when treating a patient. Looking at all the possible treatments both Alternative and mainstream and treating the Whole body, mind and spirit would be an effective approach to tackle physical illness. Some cutting edge hospitals have started using Natural treatments to compliment medical care resulting in a decrease in the amount of pharmaceuticals and high tech expensive treatments.

Several hospitals including some in London and Toronto are using Acupuncture in some cases for pain relief and most recently, fertility issues. Massage, Therapeutic Touch, Reiki, Music Therapy, and relaxation techniques are effectively reducing the amount of pain medication used by Cancer and Arthritic patients in many hospitals. Due to increase in demand and public knowledge, hospitals devoted to integrative medicine are popping up around the globe. These specialty hospitals mostly in the United Kingdom and the United States, offer the latest state

of the art medical care, incorporating both Alternative and Western therapies. Patients seeking this Holistic approach travel great distances to receive this premium care.

The obvious trend towards the use of these therapies indicates the public's desire to change. The ideal system encourages a focus on the areas of prevention, health maintenance and healing. It recognizes the importance of compassion and caring, emphasizes the importance of relationship-based care, encourages patients to share in decision making about therapeutic options, and promotes choices in care that can include complementary therapies where appropriate.