

Healing Journal

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Around the World and Close to Home

Complementary care is gaining momentum as it gains acceptance.



In 2002, the World Health Organization published a document stating its Traditional Medicine strategy for upcoming years. Included in this report were some remarkable statistics: Traditional medicines (as defined as treatments including Chinese medicine, Indian ayurveda, indigenous therapies and more) are widely used and of growing health and economic importance. For instance, in Africa, up to 80 percent of the population uses traditional medicines. In China, 40 percent of all health care delivered is


traditional medicine. In developing countries, the widespread acceptance of traditional medicine is attributed to its accessibility as well as its affordability.

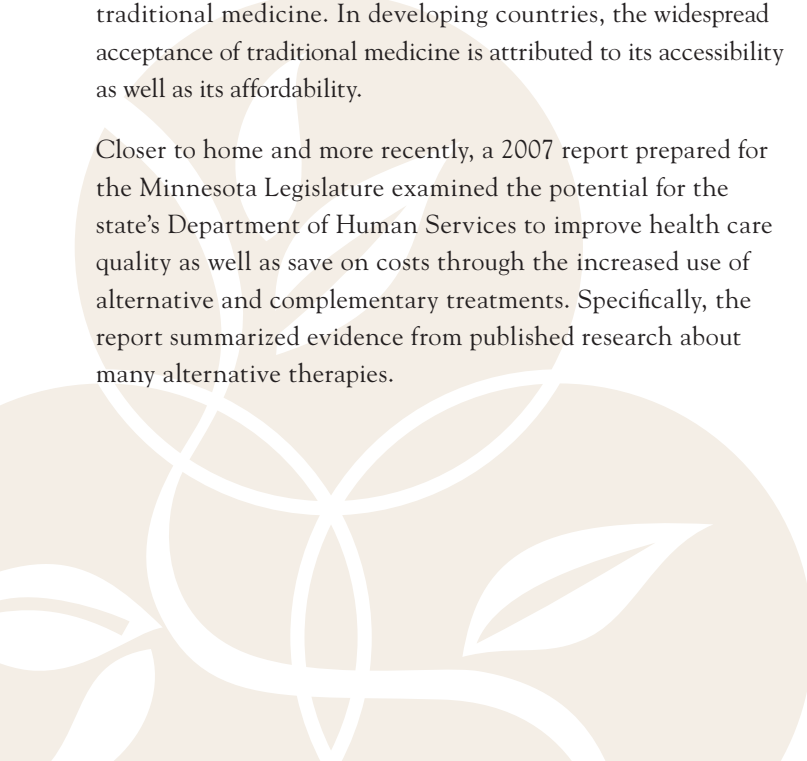
Closer to home and more recently, a 2007 report prepared for the Minnesota Legislature examined the potential for the state's Department of Human Services to improve health care quality as well as save on costs through the increased use of alternative and complementary treatments. Specifically, the report summarized evidence from published research about many alternative therapies.

The results identified acupuncture, chiropractic care and chelation therapy as the three highest-scoring therapies, with biofeedback and massage also receiving nods as effective and having the potential to improve patient care cost-effectively. As of right now, there are no pending proposals to officially affect public health program coverage or increase access to complementary and alternative medicine, but the report stands as a strong document in favor of the possibility.

Licensed acupuncturist and Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Association of Minnesota board member Bonnie M. Abel Bolash sees this growing interest and investment in research as a good sign. "I think Minnesota is moving in a positive direction compared to some states that do not even license acupuncturists," commented Abel Bolash. "We are now seeing an increase in the use of acupuncture in hospitals."

To spur more interest and understanding in the possibilities of alternative and complementary medicine, acupuncturist Jennifer Blair from the Institute of Health and Hearing testified in front of the Health and Human Services committee about integrative therapies. And while the current climate is one of acceptance, the next step in integrative care appears to be fully integrating these therapies into the treatment plans—and insurance coverage—of more Minnesotans, perhaps someday even to the level of acceptance of the rest of the world.

Note: The World Health Organization Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005 is available to download in its entirety at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/WHO_EDM_TRM_2002.1.pdf 




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Living Well, One Workout at a Time

After a diabetes diagnosis, Katherine Henry, RN, changed her life and reclaimed her health.

When asked to describe her physical condition in November 2006, Katherine Henry summarized it in one simple sentence: “I was a couch potato.” Henry had always hated exercise to such a degree that she had gone from being normal weight for her height in her twenties and thirties to an unhealthy 232 pounds at the age of 61. But at an annual exam, her doctor delivered a brutal wake-up call: A diagnosis of type two diabetes.

As a registered nurse, Henry was well aware of the potential complications of diabetes at her age and weight. “I thought, ‘I don’t want to be blind in a wheelchair, a double amputee waiting for a transplant,’ she said. “Up until then, when I had made little attempts to lose weight, I would just try to starve myself. I wouldn’t lose anything and would think, ‘What the heck, who cares.’ And I would walk by the Abbott Northwestern’s LiveWell Fitness Center every day on the way to work and think that I should go in. But I’d keep walking.”

However, after her diabetes diagnosis, Henry decided to take advantage of the fitness and nutrition counseling available at the LiveWell Center. Their first task: an evaluation to create Henry’s plan to lose weight, gain strength and control her illness. “They did an hour-and-a-half fitness evaluation,” she chuckled. “I could barely last 15 minutes on the treadmill, even at a low speed.” Susan Masemer, manager of the Center, remembers Henry’s evaluation well. “When I originally put her on the treadmill, Katherine’s aerobic capacity was quite limited. In addition, her body fat measured at 41 percent—more than 11 percent above healthy levels—and her strength and flexibility were below average as well.”

Fast-forward six months: Katherine Henry’s body fat has dropped to 30 percent, and after steadily working on the weight machines three days a week and using the treadmill five days a week, she’s weighing in at a remarkable 174 pounds. “I did a fitness test after two months because the Center staff could already see the results of my regular exercise and dietary changes,” recalled Henry. “And as of December, I had already replaced eight pounds of fat with lean muscle.” Her routine was to visit the Center before her work shift, serving the dual purpose of getting the workout out of the way as well as getting energized for the day ahead.

Masemer recalls a story that Henry shared that illustrated how drastically her body had changed: “Katherine had gotten out of her car in her garage, and when she walked by the trash can, she realized that for the first time, she didn’t need to turn sideways to get through the narrow space. As she’s

lost the 60 pounds, she’s had to replace her clothes multiple times—they were falling off.” Her doctor noticed the difference as well—in fact, she was completely flabbergasted. “When I went to see her in September and then in January, she said I was a model patient. She had never seen anyone change so drastically. And now my cholesterol, triglyceride and glucose readings have all dropped into the normal range, without medication.”



Henry’s intent is to continue to manage diabetes solely through diet and exercise for as long as possible. “I see people taking medication just to cover their diabetes so they can eat whatever they want, and that’s a mistake,” she said. “This is a progressive disease. If you don’t manage it, then you get severe complications, and they will come more quickly. When I first got this diagnosis, I thought for sure I’d have to go on medications. But not yet.”

Henry’s joy is evident in her voice as she reports her successes. “I’m not losing weight and changing my lifestyle so I can be a hot babe. I just am managing my disease the best I can. Even changing my diet hasn’t been that difficult to stick to. Carbs are really your enemy with diabetes, but if I want to eat something, I’ll eat it. I’ll just do it purposefully and planned, instead of punishing myself or giving up. But even as I give myself permission to have a hamburger and fries, I find that I’m craving salad and lean things.”

Masemer and her fellow LiveWell Fitness Center staff have noticed differences in Henry beyond the physical. “I just look at her now, and she is so much more joyful and energetic,” commented Masemer. “She doesn’t even look like the same person as her check-in photo from when she joined the Center—there’s a youthfulness and vitality, an emotional change where you can tell she feels good about herself.”



Emotional Displays

Want to track—and control—your stress level? Embrace the emWave.

Professional athletes, CEOs and other individuals who often find themselves in intense, heightened situations are painfully aware of how stress levels can affect performance. The key is gaining control of emotions and negative thoughts, and returning your body to a more relaxed, positive mode. The trick, for many people, is recognizing when your stress level is increasing so that you can reverse its negative effects. Psychologist and biofeedback therapist Mark Roa is offering patients a new tool to help: a HeartMath product called the emWave®.

“The emWave is a form of biofeedback, in which someone learns to change their physiology, usually with the idea of developing a familiar and reliable skill of relaxation, increased awareness and control of unhelpful physical responses,” said Roa. Everyday function can be affected when a person remains in an anxious or stressed state; if an individual is suffering from any physical ailments or challenges, the symptoms can become more intense. “Headaches, back pain, chronic pain—all of these things get worse with stress,” said Roa. “But by decreasing stress responses and increasing calming responses, we can counteract potentially harmful effects.”

When a stressed human body is responding to a perceived or actual threat, the “fight or flight” response kicks in. The nervous system goes into a state of readiness, raising the heart rate and blood pressure, pumping blood to the organs and away from the periphery—one of the reasons that your hands or feet feel cold when you are nervous or frightened.


Developed from 16 years of rigorous scientific research, the emWave mirrors a user’s emotional state by monitoring heart rhythms. As anxiety, fear or frustration affect your heartbeat, the emWave alerts the user through visual and audible cues. “It’s a fun little hand-held device,” said Roa. “A light goes from red to blue and then to green as you practice self-calming. There’s a built-in visual metronome to guide breathing and give

a person something to focus on—it’s great because breathing is always a basic part of any biofeedback and relaxation training.”

The emWave provides a direct feedback loop, accelerating the relaxation process with encouraging and immediate readings. As the user watches what’s happening on the device, he or she can see how techniques shift heart rate patterns. Roa lists gentle, steady breathing and an intentional focus on emotions of peace or gratitude as techniques that help. By seeing that they can have a direct effect on their physiological stress responses, users then relax even further.

While Roa uses the device for outpatient clients of the Institute for Health and Healing, it has proven so effective and popular that the emWave is in its initial stages of being used for inpatient treatments as well. Pat Vitale, director of the Institute for Health and Healing, is excited about the potential. “It’s small, portable and very easy to teach any patient to use since it’s one of the least complicated devices out there. In fact, Children’s Hospital has started using it with kids as well.”

Despite the simplicity of the device, there is extremely detailed and extensive research backing up its function. “I’m impressed with the research that the emWave’s company has done,” commented Roa. “I can share that research with clients and then have them see for themselves how an intentional emotional shift can impact their physiology. The goal is for the person to reach the point where they can identify how they are best influencing the feedback of the emWave, and then take that awareness into their daily life. With practice, the biofeedback becomes a secondary confirmation of one’s self-calming skill. In essence, a user becomes their own emotional coach as they learn to recognize the effects of stress, prevent anxiety and refocus into a calmer, more focused state.”

To find out more about biofeedback and emWave, contact the Institute for Health and Healing at 612-863-3333. 

Move, Breathe, Heal

Therapeutic yoga stretches the opportunities for holistic healing.

Yoga is an ancient practice with modern therapeutic applications. While yoga offers low-impact, health-benefiting exercise to all, it also has benefits on a therapeutic level when offered by a person who can craft a practice to specific condition-created needs or limitations. Megan Hatch, a healing arts practitioner and registered yoga instructor at the Institute for Health and Healing, explains: “Yoga classes are great, but there are some body issues that may not be able to be addressed or taken into

consideration in a group setting. A lot of the yoga that you find in neighborhood studios or gyms is focused primarily on strength and flexibility. Our therapeutic yoga is focused on being an adjunct to conventional care for health-related concerns.”

While Hatch does offer group yoga classes such as Beginning Gentle Yoga and Chair Yoga, she feels the most effective way

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From the Institute for Health and Healing

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to use therapeutic yoga is through one-on-one sessions. “For instance, what is right for one person’s lower back pain is not necessarily going to be appropriate to another person’s,” she commented. Many of the patients whom Hatch works with at the Institute are individuals dealing with cancer diagnoses. In addition to the physical effects of the illness and the side effects of conventional treatments, she sees how the emotional stress affects them. “Yoga can help with the fatigue, aches and pains—but it can also help with the physical and emotional stress that a diagnosis can cause. That stress is so hard on their bodies, at a time when their bodies are already challenged. As a self-care practice, yoga is something that people can do for themselves in the midst of all these other treatments.”

Every yoga practice that Hatch designs has three components: Breath, gentle movements and relaxation. “Yoga is not the sort of exercise where you go, you do it while thinking about something else, and you’re done. It’s not like lifting weights,” she explains. “Yoga is about the connection between breath and movement, and breathing *with* the movement. This helps reinforce the mind-body connection.” As Hatch works with an individual going through cancer

treatments, she customizes her approach to the patient, focusing the three components in a restorative direction.

She also uses yoga to supplement treatment for other conditions such as multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia and chronic pain. “One of the best things therapeutic yoga has to offer when living with an illness or pain is increased body and breath awareness. Since our breath mimics the stresses that we feel, a patient’s breathing tends to be faster and more shallow than is optimal,” Hatch commented. “I typically teach ways to gently slow the breath down, deepening and lengthening the inhalations and exhalations. By doing this, it sends a message to your nervous system that says, ‘It’s OK to relax, it’s OK to let go.’ ”

Recent research supports and mirrors Hatch’s accounts of therapeutic yoga’s success, including reports published in *Annals of Internal Medicine and Psycho-Oncology*, spotlighting data on yoga’s physical and psychological benefits as a complementary treatment for breast cancer, cardiovascular disease and chronic low-back pain. Hatch notes, “A regular yoga practice, appropriate to your individual needs, supports health and well-being in a holistic way.” 