

Holistic medicine provides alternative form of healing

By Rachel Priest

Connections

IU student Ashley Ginascol could feel it coming on. Her muscles would tighten up, she would feel dizzy, and eventually that muscle pain would turn into a horrible headache. It would last for hours, even days sometimes. She would lie in bed, waiting for the pain to stop. She went to two different doctors and took high dosages of pain medicine. Nothing worked. That is until she discovered the benefits of Tibetan medicine.

Ginascol joined the increasing trend of [holistic medicine treatments](#), also known as Tibetan medicine, that in recent years began receiving attention in the United States. Although Tibetan medicine has been around for thousands of years, many are just discovering the benefits of it.

"Once I started taking the herbs and worked on changing my diet, my headaches were almost gone completely," said Ginascol. "Before that I was taking up to eight Advil a day for pain. I couldn't study and it was hard for me to get anything done."

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Holistic Medicine in Bloomington

Dr. Yangbum Gyal is a visiting physician from [Tibet](#) at [the Center for Wholism](#), a holistic medical facility on Walnut St. in Bloomington. He along with nine other medical practitioners use different Tibetan medical practices, such as acupuncture and herbal treatments. Gyal said that often people's sedentary lifestyle leads to illness.

"I see people heal," said Dr. Gyal speaking about different types of treatments.

"Treatment often times is changing their diet and lifestyle. If necessary, I'll give them some herbs."

The holistic medicine trend has been slow to catch on in the United States mainly because the Tibetans so closely guard their culture, where medicine plays a large role. In Terry Clifford's book "Tibetan Buddhist Medicine and Psychiatry," she says that Tibet was once known as "the country of medicine."

History of Tibetan Medicine

The Tibetan medical system dates back



The Center for Wholism provides patients with several different Tibetan medical practices. Among these are acupuncture and herbal treatments.

Image by Rachel Priest

more than 2500 years, making it one of the world's oldest medical traditions. It is a medical practice that is linked to Buddhism. Buddhist philosophy says all humans suffer during some part of their life because of harmful acts from this life or a previous life. Buddhism teaches that only through Dharma that people can escape the cycle of suffering.

It is through this Buddhist philosophy that Tibetan medical doctors use the holistic approach to health care, which emphasizes care for emotional, spiritual, social, and physical aspects of health.

When the Center for Wholism opened in December of 1997, few people knew the benefits of holistic medicine. Today the center averages 2000 patients, with numbers increasing everyday as more people in Bloomington learn the benefits of holistic medicine.

"We definitely treat major illnesses," said Anne Delgado, a receptionist at the Center. "We also provide different treatments such as acupuncture and stress management."

Another holistic treatment that is common is herbal therapy, which uses herbs made from plants and minerals. Massage therapy is used to reduce stress and rid toxins from the body.

"Massages are very healing because the body responds well to physical touch," said Mary Page, a licensed massage therapist. "They very much connect people to their spiritual self."



Dr. Yangbum Gyal demonstrates a woodstick healing device. This form of treatment is used to increase circulation in the body.

Image by Rachel Priest

An Increasing Trend

Although the popularity of holistic medicine is increasing, it does not come without some controversy. According to [the American Holistic Medical Association webpage](#), practices are not always scientifically based, although there is some increasing scientific evidence that there are physical benefits to treatment.

Tibetan medicine is based on "principles of practice from many diverse disciplines and healing traditions." Holistic practitioners typically are not medical doctors, although some rarely are. The American Board of Holistic Medicine has not been accepted into [the American Board of Medical Specialties](#), which serves as the governing body of all medical boards in the United States because more research needs to be done.

"If symptoms go away people think that they're cured," said Gyal. "Tibetan medicine treats the root of the problem, not just the symptom."

As Tibetan medical practices becomes increasingly more popular, more people will begin integrating it into their lifestyle

according to the American Holistic Medical Association webpage. Often times, it prevents major illnesses from happening because the body's physical, mental, and emotional issues are taken care of.

"It has become such a huge factor in my life now," said Ginascol. "Before I got involved in it I always ate junk food and would never exercise. Now I remember to take my herbs, eat the right foods, and I go to yoga. It has definitely made a difference."

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