

Body, Mind and Soul

Faculty members use integrative medicine to treat patients and teach students alternate methods of care.

Written by Ann Muder, design by Reagan Coyle

Joy Weydert, M.D., had a car accident when she was in high school. While she didn't suffer any broken bones, she had a back injury that caused severe muscle spasms and pains that shot down her legs. When the pain wouldn't go away, she followed the advice of some friends and sought alternative therapies. Within a couple of weeks, her pain was gone. That experience helped her realize that pain relief could come through more than just one avenue.

"Integrative medicine isn't an alternative to conventional medicine. It's using everything together," says Dr. Weydert, assistant professor of pediatrics, director of Integrative Pain Management at Children's Mercy Hospital. "A lot of times these modalities, like acupuncture, can really add and augment what conventional medicine has to offer."

As Americans become more interested in alternative forms of care, physicians are learning the value of combining this medicine with traditional care. Integrative medicine involves using complementary and alternative treatments along with conventional medicine to heal the whole patient—body, mind and soul.

"You're not just looking at their body and the disease," says Laura Fitzmaurice, M.D., professor of pediatrics, division chief of Emergency Medical Services at Children's Mercy Hospital. "You're looking at the whole person, and you're utilizing whatever resources have been proven to be helpful."

Faculty members are increasingly using integrative medicine – both in their practices and in the school's curriculum. Earlier this year, many of them gathered with other experts in the field to discuss establishing a Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the school.

"The same amount of money is spent on integrative medicine practices as all of primary health care, and most of those dollars are directly out-of-pocket by the consumer," says Richard Derman, M.D., interim associate dean for research, associate dean for women's health, and the Victor and Caroline Schutte Foundation/Missouri Endowed Chair in Women's Health, UMKC/Truman Medical Center. "We would be foolhardy not to explore how to move the agenda forward, particularly as we study which interventions are clinically beneficial."

Even before the meeting, many faculty members were already pursuing interests in integrative medicine. In addition to treating patients, they are also researching which treatments work and teaching medical students about the importance of integrative medicine.

"A lot of these students are going to have patients someday that want complementary treatments in some form or another," says Nora Quiason, M.D., clinical assistant professor of psychiatry, Western Missouri Mental Health Center.

"Physicians have to be educated in what's evidence-based. We don't have the luxury of thinking that this worked for my uncle, so it might work for you. We have to make a diagnosis and treatment, and that might include some type of complementary medicine."

Acupuncture for Addiction

In a small office at Western Missouri Mental Health Center, Dr. Quiason talks softly to her patient as she places two needles in the patient's right ear. The patient winces a bit and then relaxes. This patient has been battling a drug addiction to heroin for the past 20 years. Dr. Quiason hopes that this acupuncture treatment will help relieve her craving, so she can get through her drug withdrawal easier.

Western Missouri Mental Health Center started an acupuncture clinic in 1990 after Dr. Quiason heard about a similar acupuncture program that was being used in a hospital in the Bronx. The procedure reportedly helped drug addicts by relieving stress, withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Dr. Quiason went to the Hennepin County Medical Center in Minneapolis, Minn., while another staff member went to Lincoln Hospital Methadone Clinic in New York City to train in detoxification acupuncture sponsored by the National Association for Detoxification Acupuncture (NADA). Dr. Quiason later completed a distance-learning program at the University of California-Los Angeles to receive formal training in medical acupuncture. The acupuncture clinic at Western Missouri Mental Health Center was open to the public until 2001 when it lost state funding due to budget constraints. It now operates as an inpatient treatment program for drug-addicted and mentally ill patients.

"Many times, addicts don't have the money to afford a lot of therapies," says Dr. Quiason. "I was looking for something that would be cost-effective and helpful for them."

In a detoxification treatment protocol, acupuncture needles are placed in two areas in the ear. Clips are attached to needles, and then connected to an electro-stimulator. The stimulator is turned to the lowest setting so the patient feels a "buzzing" sensation. Through this stimulation, the patient's body produces endorphins, which help to ease the discomfort of withdrawal symptoms.

While the treatment is used to relieve symptoms, it does not keep the person from using drugs. It is often used in conjunction with a methadone treatment to help the patients conquer their

(Right) At Western Missouri Mental Health Center, Nora Quiason, M.D., offers elective student rotations in acupuncture and alternative therapies.





addictions. In some cases, acupuncture may be used when methadone treatment is not available, such as when a person is going to prison or being extradited.

Dr. Quiason says the acupuncture has proved to be a successful adjunctive treatment for many of her patients.

“The patient still has to go for aftercare, so that they don’t start using the drug again,” she says. “But at least this way, they won’t be sick if they don’t have the drug.”

Dr. Quiason has offered elective student rotations in acupuncture and alternative therapies for the last several years. She says that while the rotation originally focused on just acupuncture, her students were so interested in integrative medicine that she expanded the rotation to include other forms of therapy as well. She sets up appointments with the students to talk with other professionals, including nutritionists, chiropractors, and other licensed acupuncturists.

“The whole idea is for them to be exposed to the different varieties of modalities that patients might be utilizing so that they can have an educated conversation with their patients about the pros and cons of it,” she says.

In addition, Dr. Quiason leads groups that incorporate yoga principles for students and outpatients. She says she has the students attend the class to show them the benefits of yoga for their patients and themselves. For example, for patients with arthritis, the yoga helps them develop the core muscles in the trunk and legs so they don’t stress out their joints. For asthma patients, it helps them learn to breathe when they have bronchial constrictions.

Dr. Quiason says the classes are also helpful for the students’ own well-being. “We use the yoga to teach them focus, and the need for balance in their lives. Most of them end up enrolling in the yoga classes after the rotation is finished.”

Power of Faith

What role does prayer have in medicine? Many researchers have sought to answer that question. A few years ago, a study led by William Harris, Ph.D., professor of medicine, Daniel J. Lauer, M.D./Missouri Endowed Chair in Metabolism and Vascular Disease Research, found that heart patients who were admitted to Saint Luke’s Hospital’s coronary care unit did better when people prayed for them, even though they didn’t know they were the subject of these prayers.

Dr. Fitzmaurice developed an interest in prayer medicine after reading similar studies showing the positive effects of prayer. She recently conducted a study to find out how prayer affects children who are hospitalized with bronchiolitis. Her study was the first to look at the impact of prayer on children’s healing.

The study involved 292 patients, two-years-old or younger. She randomly selected one group of children to be prayed for by intercessors during the hospitalization. Her study found that those patients who were prayed for had 26 percent fewer complications than those who weren’t.

Because of her interest in prayer research, Dr. Fitzmaurice decided to pursue further training in integrative medicine. She enrolled in a distance-based fellowship in integrative medicine
(Left) At Children’s Mercy Hospital, Joy Weydert, M.D., helps patients deal with chronic pain through interventional techniques such as guided imagery and relaxation.

at the University of Arizona. Dr. Fitzmaurice says that the most important thing the fellowship has taught her is to take care of the whole person and treat everyone as an individual.

“I think I’m much more aware of the spiritual connection in medicine, and I think that’s especially important for families in emergencies,” she says. “I ask about their spiritual connection, and how we can help them with that, whether that be calling somebody or praying with the family.”

Mind over Matter

Dr. Weydert helps kids learn to manage their pain when conventional medicine isn’t enough. In 2002, she was hired by Children’s Mercy Hospital to develop an Integrative Pain Management Program. The program uses integrative medicine to help kids deal with chronic pain issues through a variety of therapies, including mind/body medicine, cognitive-behavioral therapy, massage therapy, and osteopathic medicine.

“Some kids may have chronic pain from their cancers or from unknown sources,” says Dr. Weydert, who completed a fellowship in pediatric integrative medicine at the University of Arizona. “I think each of the divisions in the hospital was wanting to help these kids not only with their pain but to improve the quality of their lives.”

Patients are referred to Dr. Weydert after receiving a full evaluation to assess the cause of their pain. Her staff will then help the children manage their pain by teaching them interventional techniques including deep-breathing techniques, relaxation and self-hypnosis. In some cases, they may refer the patient to an outside specialist, such as an acupuncturist or osteopathic physician.

Many patients have found they can manage their pain through a technique called guided imagery, a form of self-hypnosis to help them relax and heal the whole body, mind, and spirit. Last year, Dr. Weydert conducted a study into using guided imagery to treat recurrent abdominal pain in children. The children were taught to relax their muscles and to come up with an image in their mind that would describe their pain. Then, they were asked to come up with an image that would make the first image better. After a few weeks, most of the children reported a significant decrease in the amount of pain. Most were back in school, and a number of them were completely pain-free.

“It’s a really great self-regulation technique,” says Dr. Weydert. “Kids can access their own inner healing and rely on themselves to take care of their problem rather than always looking to outside sources like medication or treatment.”

Another self-regulation technique, called biofeedback, allows the kids to see how relaxation affects their body. The patients wear probes that measure their temperature and muscle tone. When they are stressed, their temperature gets colder and the tension in their muscles increases.

“We do this with the kids to show them that they can control how their body functions,” she says. “With more practice and techniques, they can learn how to control their pain, just like they can control their muscles.”

While right now the clinic only treats patients at Children’s Mercy, Dr. Weydert hopes to expand to treat patients outside the hospital as well.



Medical students learn about the importance of spirituality and cultural beliefs as part of their curriculum. In the Sickle Cell Clinic at Truman Medical Center Hospital Hill, Erin Teeter, MS 4, (right) goes on rounds with Chaplain Estee McClendon (middle) to learn about how to provide emotional and spiritual support for patients.

“Our hope is once we grow and hire more staff, that we’ll be able to open up our services to outside physicians or self-referrals from families,” she says.

Integrative Teaching

As an undergraduate, Angela Barnett, M.D., worked as an assistant for a doctor of Oriental Medicine in California, helping him do herbal counseling for patients.

“I got to see firsthand how a patient could be healed through herbs and changes in diet, and how it could make a significant difference in that person’s lifestyle,” she says. “It had a big impact on me, before I was even introduced to traditional Western medicine at medical school.”

Today, Dr. Barnett is again studying “Eastern medicine” and other integrative practices by completing a fellowship in integrative medicine along with Dr. Fitzmaurice.

“In one of our labs, we actually taste the botanical medicines and herbal drinks to see from firsthand experience how they work,” she says. “It’s been a great experience for me to learn more

about these types of medicine that I used to work with.”

Dr. Barnett says she eventually hopes to bring what she’s learned to a future generation of physicians. As clinical assistant professor in community and family medicine, she spends time showing the medical students and residents at Truman Medical Center Lakewood the different alternative therapies that patients can try.

“It’s important for these students to know, since so many people are using these types of therapies, with or without their physician’s knowledge,” she says. “As medical faculty, we’ll play a significant role in teaching these students about alternative therapies.”

Faculty members are already looking at how to incorporate this subject into the students’ education. One of the objectives of establishing a Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine is to make integrative medicine a formal part of the school’s curriculum.

“Medical students will likely be involved in various areas of research,” says Dr. Derman, who is leading the steering committee

to establish the center. "What they do at the medical school will be heavily grounded in clinical protocols, including outcomes research to determine the clinical benefits of these integrative practices."

As of now, students are being introduced to the basic concepts of integrative medicine. During their third year, students learn about the importance of spirituality in health care (see sidebar). In their fourth year, medical students are required to write a paper on an integrative therapy as part of their family practice clerkship at TMC Lakewood. According to Rose Zwerenz, M.D., assistant dean, Truman Medical Center Lakewood Programs, the students explore whether the treatments are beneficial based on scientific evidence, and how they would feel about recommending them to their patients.

"My goal is for them to learn the facts about integrative medicine, rather than base their opinions on hearsay," she says. "They need to be informed whether a therapy has a potential value or a potential danger to the patient."

Dr. Zwerenz says that the goal is for students to open the lines of communication with their patients, whether they participate in integrative medicine or not.

"Statistics show that almost half of patients are using complementary and alternative medicine practices on their own," she says. "It's important for physicians to be knowledgeable about these therapies because if they're not asking about them, they'll miss out on part of the patient's care." ■

Spirituality in Medicine

Third-year medical students are learning the importance of treating the whole patient, not just the disease. Through a skills class called C.U.E.S. (Communication, Understanding, Education, and Self-Assessment), they learn how to communicate with patients including talking to them about spirituality, cultural beliefs, and other factors that affect their quality of life.

During the class, the students are required to shadow a hospital chaplain as well as visit a hospice or long-term care facility. Through these exercises, they observe how psychosocial, spiritual, and cultural issues may affect the patients' care.

Erin Teeter, MS 4, says that during her chaplain-shadowing experience at Truman Medical Center, she learned different ways to provide emotional and spiritual support for her patients.

"I was really fascinated by the way the chaplain was called in at the bedside to discuss with us the importance of providing spiritual support throughout their hospital stay."

At Truman Medical Center, students shadow the chaplain on rounds with him, all families, and other Truman Medical Center staff to help students learn how to integrate spirituality into their personal lives and infusing patients with their personal beliefs.

"In many cases, physicians are unaware of their own spiritual or religious beliefs," says Dr. Zwerenz. "Spirituality is a very important aspect of patient care as patients feel more secure with physicians who have spiritual sensitivity. It's important to communicate with a patient about their spiritual beliefs."

He says that most students that shadow the chaplain at the hospital have positive reactions to the experience.

"Probably ninety percent of the students that come through show a deep appreciation for it," he says.

"It feels good to know that this experience can have a global impact on the quality of care for patients when these students enter practice."

Ann Muder

