

Integrative Medicine: The Creation of a New Science

Neil Demarse

It appears that acupuncture, not herbology, has taken on the leading roll in mainstreaming alternative medicine. Had it not been for the willingness of chronically ill patients to seek outside treatment for their associated symptoms, MDs would not have become so curious about the effects of acupuncture. Forget Chinese medicine: the evolution of the "science of acupuncture" has inevitably begun, and modern medicine and scientific experimentation are the future of this science. Integration needs to take place for acupuncture to survive as a system of care outside the private practice or no-fault clinic.

To have a truly synergistic means of treatment, all ideas must be bound cohesively into a greater body of knowledge. Realistically, this will take place in the form of a combination of TCM theories and Western medical theories. It is apparent to the erudite practitioner of Chinese medicine that a considerable overlap exists in TCM and allopathic medicine. China is a clear working example that integrative medicine can work, with acupuncture and herbs administered as commonly as surgery and pharmaceuticals. Still, many parts of the Western world openly resist these ideas.

Rigorous experimentation is the only way integration will be allowed to take place. Such an undertaking will take decades, and will not be based on the people's willingness to seek out alternative treatments or increased public opinion. Researchers will discover what acupuncture is good for (and what it isn't good for), how it works, and how old theories need to be modified. Progress has been made, but the key to integration is definitely research.

Chinese herbs also need experimentation, but in the U.S., their future will be headed toward the pharmaceutical industry. Herbs known to have effects on certain disease states will be able to be synthesized in a lab like any other medication. In this way, compliance and regulation will increase.

Who will head up such an undertaking? Acupuncturists and herbalists with PhD degrees in physics, chemistry, pharmacology, biochemistry, neuroscience, etc., along with acupuncturists who hold MD degrees. In fact, many PhD and MD programs are interested in accepting candidates who have backgrounds in disciplines other than the traditional sciences. Volumes of research are waiting to be published, and there is no shortage of funding for new, revolutionary studies. Developing a body of knowledge that can withstand scientific scrutiny and not lie solely on the back of history, is beneficial for the public and the science as a whole. If practitioners of Oriental medicine will embrace this quest, a new medicine will evolve, with more jobs for graduates, more cutting-edge technologies, and a more advanced, effective system of care.

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