

UCSF Medical School Offers Traditional Chinese Medicine Elective Course

Editorial Staff

There's no doubt that interest in traditional Chinese medicine is on the rise, not just among consumers, but within the allopathic Western medical community. In order to keep up with this growing demand, more and more medical schools are including discussions of integrated medicine and various CAM therapies.

The *Nutrition Business Journal* reported in November of last year that, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), [113 of the nation's 126](#) accredited medical schools now incorporate discussion of integrative medicine into their required courses. Seventy-seven medical schools offer stand-alone electives, which may include courses on traditional Chinese medicine. Furthermore, as of last year, eight universities, including the University of Arizona, the University of Texas and the University of Connecticut, require that medical students take part in a 250-hour integrative-medicine curriculum as part of their three-year residency after medical school. Even *Acupuncture Today* reported on an [elective TCM internship](#) available to all medical students within the University of California education system.

Ellen Hughes, MD, PhD, former director of education for the [Osher Center for Integrative Medicine](#) at the University of California-San Francisco (UCSF) told the *Nutrition Business Journal*, "I devote much of my lecture time in the required curriculum to botanicals and supplements, given that they are so commonly used by patients. Students are exposed to this subject throughout their education."

Now, it appears that UCSF has taken this one step further and is in the process of developing its first-ever semester-long TCM elective course, available to medical, pharmacy, nursing, and physical-therapy students. The course, entitled "Integrating Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) into Clinical Practice," will start with the fall semester. According to Shirley Wong, UCSF Class of 2010 pharmacy doctoral candidate and one of the program coordinators, "We believe that it is crucial that future health professionals learn about different modalities of healing, especially TCM, potential drug-drug interactions between TCM and Western medicine, TCM treatments for Western illnesses, and the risks and benefits of TCM."

Acupuncture Today columnist, John K. Chen, PhD, PharmD, OMD, LAc, was asked to help teach the course. He told *AT*, "Many medical/pharmacy schools around the U.S. have slowly begun to accept complementary and alternative medicine as a whole and, to some extent, traditional Chinese medicine. I have taught quite a few classes on Chinese herbs to schools such as the University of Southern California and University of California at Irvine. However, most of these classes are limited to one or two hours only, which is barely enough to cover the very basic overview. It is certainly very exciting to know one of the best medical and pharmacy schools in the nation is opening its doors not only to CAM, but specifically to TCM."

Wong also added in her enthusiasm for the new program: "I'm really excited since we've already

had a number of students and instructors inquire about this elective after I sent out the e-mail announcement. At the moment, this elective is not part of any core pharmacy curriculum; it is merely an elective students may take to fulfill their general requirements. My hope is that the turnout at this elective will show professors and the UCSF faculty that there needs to be some integration of other, less-conventional modalities into the core curriculum."

AUGUST 2009