



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Integrative Healthcare: An East West Perspective

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine schools educate their students to understand that a patient's specific health concerns are important to understand, as well as the patient's more general concerns about elevating personal stress levels in navigating the health care system. The U.S. is the most advanced country in medical technology and draws patients from all over the world to receive the best care.

Unfortunately, a patient has to have adequate income, and typically, insurance to be able to receive affordable care, although possession of either or both of these does not guarantee complete whole-person health care. On March 23, 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law. The ACA was implemented to benefit patients and have co-management of patients in hospitals and other health care facilities.

For seven years the externships of East West College of Natural Medicine (EWCNM) have been teaching students about the type of integration fostered by the ACA. The college's externships are at HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital, which is located in Sarasota, Fla.



Teaching Integration

These externships provide four EWCNM students (per term) an opportunity to help build the interpersonal relationships needed between acupuncturists and other health care practitioners. Also, this teaches students the need for integration and the importance of shared goals, while improving the quality of whole-person health care for approximately 45 patients at the hospital.

In a study of the implementation of the ACA, the results showed that when under a co-management company, hospitals and physicians carrying out specific day-to-day actions had the ability to share goals and to enable more quality communication.¹

In teaching our students about whole-person health care, we know that science is quite clear when it comes to physics, biology, anatomy, and biochemistry. There is less clarity, however, concerning the social dimensions of humanity. Human beings are a biopsychosocial phenomenon and alternative therapies such as counseling, Oriental medicine, herbal medicine, nutrition, and other restorative therapies can accelerate a person's healing through whole-person health care.

The more acupuncture externships that can be established in hospitals and other integrative settings, the more acupuncture will be demanded or expected in the American health care system. Thus, creating competitive edge benefits, not only for our students but for all acupuncture schools across the country, by bringing much-needed attention to our practitioners and our ability to achieve outcomes.

Working side-by-side with scientists, medical doctors, and other health care experts can significantly increase the evidentiary standing we deserve as holistic health care professionals. One of our recent graduates applied for an acupuncturist position at Harvard University and made it to the second round

of interviews along with five others vying for the same position. Although the graduate was passed over for a more seasoned practitioner, he learned from the interviewer that he made it to the second round because of his experience with integration in the HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital externship.

HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital

It is important for complementary and alternative interventions such as acupuncture to be readily available to patients to achieve whole-person health care. Implementation of alternative interventions at HealthSouth has opened the potential to increase the satisfaction of patients with their outcomes and their willingness to receive treatments.

It has also provided the opportunity for doctors to collaborate and broaden their knowledge base to bring additional healing modalities to future patients. Nurses at HealthSouth have stated that "patients respond more positively and have a quicker recovery after acupuncture."

Patients have also told the staff and students at the hospital, "I don't think I would have recovered as quickly as I did if I hadn't received acupuncture." The ability of acupuncture schools, such as EWCNM, to teach students to integrate their skills into conventional medical settings is a necessity for the growth of the profession.

Communication & Misconceptions

Teaching students the challenges of interpersonal communication with their patients is compounded by the extra layer of dialogue that is needed when communicating with Western medicine practitioners. For example, explaining damp heat to a health care provider (not just a patient) can be difficult.

Our goal at EWCNM is to help students navigate that conversation while providing the appropriate narrative to facilitate a dialog. One of our recent graduates stated, "Before taking this internship I did not fully understand the need to integrate, but now I can see why it is a necessity!" It is important to realize that an integrative approach to medicine is a way of enhancing the quality of a patient's life, which is a pillar in holistic medicine.

Another challenge that EWCNM has observed with its students and practitioners at integrative practices such as HealthSouth is a misconception about what our medicine can do. In order to clarify outcomes that can be expected, specific guidelines have been established to solidify our success in pain relief and stress reduction.

For example, there are guidelines concerning the use of acupuncture to treat amputees, stroke victims, and heart attack patients as part of the recovery plan for patients with these conditions. Only when there is a genuine understanding of all the benefits acupuncture offers, will there be a complete and robust integration of complementary medicine in conventional medical settings.

The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, which was rated by U.S. News and World Report as the top ranked hospital in the U.S.,² provides an excellent example of an institution implementing the use of alternative therapies for whole-person health care (e.g., Mayo Clinic uses acupuncture for both pain, nausea, and vomiting with cancer patients).

The enforcement of whole-person health care will reduce non-emergent cases and provide a greater amount of time for those patients with more critical conditions. Hospitals and medical facilities need to adopt the same integrative process to which the Mayo Clinic adheres. As this happens, graduates from AOM schools will be prepared to fill the need.

References

1. Lanese B. "Implementation of the affordable care act: a case study of a service line co-management company." *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 2016; 30(6): 818-835.
2. "U.S. News & World Report Announces 2016-17 Best Hospitals." *U.S. News & World Report*, Aug 2016.

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