

The White House Policy on Complimentary and Alternative Medicine

By Kathleen Tucker L.Ac., Dipl. Ac., C.Ht.

Walking through the hospital hallways of Andrews Air Force Base, one of the most respected air bases in the United States located in Clinton, Maryland; you might not expect to find an acupuncture clinic. Colonel Richard Niemtow, a physician and oncologist turned acupuncturist has been treating airmen and women with acupuncture since 1998. He also treats the staff of the Pentagon and the White House. During his recent trip to ShangHai, China, Dr. Niemtow lectured to physicians and practitioners about his latest research entitled, “Acupuncture for Symptoms Following Radiotherapy for Head and Neck Malignancies.” (For more information about his research you can access his website at www.n5ev.com).

Many people do not realize how widespread and accepted acupuncture and many other complementary and alternative therapies have become in the last 10 years. Complementary and Alternative medicine, often called CAM therapies, is one of the fastest growing health industries in 2003. In the last year, nearly half of all Americans have used at least one type of CAM therapy. According to Dr. Gary Farr’s report, “Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States”, the CAM marketplace is valued at 24 billion dollars and has an annual growth rate of 15%”.

Complementary and Alternative therapies include acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractic medicine, hypnotherapy, meditation, massage, reiki, yoga, tai qi and more. All CAM therapies acknowledge the mind, body, spirit connection and when treatment is given, the patient’s lifestyle becomes a significant part of the treatment plan. With today’s busy lifestyle and high stress pace, experts now believe that 60 to 90 percent of all doctor visits involve stress-related complaints, in other words, an individual’s level of stress is intimately related to the disease and health in one’s life. In the September 27, 2004 edition of Newsweek magazine, Dr. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School states, “Stress related illnesses often defy conventional remedies, and when we persist with high-tech pills and procedures, the costs of treatment can easily outweigh the benefits”. Preventative medicine (CAM therapies) and a healthy lifestyle are the most effective strategy for maintaining ones health and for helping the body to heal naturally, with as little pharmaceutical and/or evasive interventions

deemed necessary. Pretty much any therapy not considered conventional medicine may fall under the category of CAM. Its presence can be seen everywhere from the most progressive hospitals to small clinics, as well as the National Institute of Health, the Pentagon, and even the White House.

The Nation's view on health care itself is in a transformation and CAM therapies are an integral influence upon that change. The White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy states, "In the United States, great strides have been made in conquering disease and extending life, and the health care system reflects these remarkable scientific advances. Yet in the quest to conquer illness and disease, national wellness and prevention efforts have been focused primarily on immunizations, disease screening and monitoring (e.g. pap smears, blood pressure checks), and services offered in response to an already identified illness or condition (e.g. physical therapy after stroke, nutritional counseling for diabetics). With some notable exceptions, wellness and health promotion have, for the most part, been left to the initiative and discretion of the individual". The White House Commission adds, "The effectiveness of the health care delivery system in the future will depend upon its ability to make use of all approaches and modalities that provide a sound basis for promoting optimal health": it continues that, "CAM practices such as acupuncture, biofeedback, yoga, massage, and tai chi, as well as certain nutritional and stress reduction practices, may be useful in contributing to the achievement of the nation's health goals and objectives".

The healthcare approach of the future will include the CAM approach – maintaining one's health, the prevention of disease, and creating a lifestyle that supports healing when disease has been established. CAM therapies have been incorporated into the curriculums of some of the highest respected teaching hospitals in the United States. Harvard Medical School, Columbia, Cornell, Stanford, John Hopkins, and George Washington University and many more have CAM centers that offer classes and treatment. In fact, 64% of US medical schools offer classes in CAM therapy. Local schools offering classes are the College of Southern Maryland (massage program) and the University of Maryland's Integrative Medicine Department.

In addition, 67% of health maintenance organizations offer at least one form of complementary alternative care. In southern Maryland, local hospitals offering these services are Calvert Memorial Hospital, CIVISTA, St. Mary's Hospital, and Anne Arundel Hospital. IN 1996, Calvert Memorial Hospital, a pioneer in prevention medicine, established one of the first

hospital based Complementary and Alternative Medicine Department in the country.

The following are brief descriptions of the most commonly used therapies:

Acupuncture is performed by a state licensed practitioner that has graduated from an accredited school. Treatment helps balance the flow of energy, blood and fluids of the body. Acupuncture has been shown to be an effective treatment for chronic and acute pain, gynecological disorders, migraines, headaches, digestive disorders, and pain from arthritis and cancer, insomnia, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and more.

Hypnotherapy is performed by a certified hypnotherapist. The therapist uses guided imagery and relaxation techniques to induce a deep state of relaxation, and then the therapist makes suggestions based on the goals of the patient. Hypnotherapy is good for smoking cessation, weight loss, stress management and anxiety.

Meditation is a combination of relaxation techniques coupled with mindful breathing techniques that allows the body and mind to relax. Meditation is excellent for helping the individual lower their blood pressure, calm their body and mind and helps the individual create a sense of calmness and well being throughout their day.

Yoga is the practice of stretching and holding poses to balance the mind, body, and spirit. Yoga helps to build strength, improve circulation, stabilize joints, and helps to bring mindfulness to one's movements and thoughts.

Tai Qi is the practice of performing sequences of slow movements coordinated with deep breathing and focused movements. Preliminary evidence suggest that when practice regularly, tai chi increases muscle strength; improves circulation and improves cardiovascular health, coordination, and balance.

For additional information and the latest scientific research, you may contact the National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine Department at the National Institute of Health at their website at www.NIH.com. For further information about The White House Commission for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine, you may go to their website at www.hccamplhs.gov.