

West Meets East

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I have been fascinated with the mysteries of the human body since an early age, which led me to the study of medicine. It wasn't until later that I discovered my deeper interest in the study and care of the human being — mind, body and spirit — through the vantage point of Eastern medicine.

In college I was introduced to yoga, as well as other Eastern philosophies, through religious studies classes, and it resonated deeply with me. Later on, after completing my medical training and becoming immersed in my PM&R

inpatient practice; I discovered the Medical Acupuncture program through UCLA and enthusiastically embraced this training and began to use these techniques with my orthopedic, pain and neurologic patients.

I went on to do a more in-depth study of traditional Chinese medicine to try to better understand the Eastern view of the origins of health and disease. I learned about the concepts of “Yin and Yang” and “Qi” and started becoming familiar with descriptive terms, like “heat,” “damp,” “wind,” and “fire,” to describe the processes within the human body. These were poetic, nature-based terms used as metaphorical descriptors for the same conditions that Western medicine describes with its Latin-based verbiage. Same issues, different language, different worldview. In the East, the human being is seen as a whole, energetic and interdependent entity, whereas in the West, we tend to view the person from a reductionist, nuts-and-bolts perspective. Both perspectives have value and not only complement, but also depend on, each other. We need both to see the bigger picture and to provide the care that our patients really need.

High-tech medicine is miraculous, spectacular and wonderful, but there is a deep wisdom hidden in low-tech offerings that can really fill in the gaps. That is why I was so excited to hear about UCLA embracing the Urban Zen program. By using some modern versions of ancient healing tools, including restorative yoga poses, in-bed movements, breath awareness, guided body scans, aromatherapy and therapeutic touch, practitioners can alleviate the symptoms of pain, anxiety, nausea, insomnia, constipation and exhaustion in hospitalized patients and bring some much-needed relief, as well as cost savings on medication use. Program patients are empowered to be more active participants in their own healing process and learn about the importance of self care.