



A new frontier IN MEDICINE?

ANCIENT HEALING PRACTICES
FIND PROPONENTS TODAY

BY PAM HALE TRACHTA

"Imagine a world in which medicine was oriented toward healing rather than disease ... where doctors believed in the natural healing capacity of human beings ... and emphasized prevention above treatment."

thus begins the introduction to the website of Dr. Andrew Weil's Program for Integrative Medicine at The University of Arizona, where the mission is no less than the transformation of health care.

The phenomenal success of Dr. Weil's educational programs and books is just one local piece of evidence pointing to a new frontier in medicine. Fourteen doctors who trained at the center have created their own integrative medicine clinics, and more than 100 are practicing in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Japan.

Others eager to explore all their options are consumers who are seeking complementary or alternative medicine (CAM), even when they have to pay for it out of their own pockets. In 1990, 33 percent of Americans used some form of CAM, and by 2001 the number had risen to 40 percent. By 2010, that figure is projected to reach at least 66 percent. By the late 1990s, Americans were spending \$21 billion a year on "alternative" modalities — modalities which may seem suspect to some, but are, nevertheless, big business.

There are many complementary and alter-

native modalities available today, but we've chosen to focus this article on one that is perhaps the least known or understood: energy healing and shamanic or spiritual healing.

There's a significant amount of research and clinical work being done in these fields by members of the university community. Many UA physicians, however, remain loyal to the science-based or allopathic medicine they know, and are leery of some of the ancient practices that are being resurrected, adapted or shared by various practitioners.

Others, like W.F. Peate, M.D., MPH, have been converted. Dr. Peate, a practicing physician and professor of medicine and public health, was one of many UA doctors who had the opportunity to work with tribal groups. He was impressed that they could utilize the best of both worlds: modern medicine and their traditional Medicine Way.

Dr. Peate, who received his medical education at Dartmouth and Harvard, admits to being embarrassed that healing techniques he thought were new and revolutionary were, in fact, ancient. As he relates in his book, *Native Healing: Four Sacred Paths to*

Health, he now examines the bodies, minds and spirits of his patients. And perhaps he looks at himself differently, as a descendant of the Mohawk and Onodaga Nations of the Iroquois. He shares his new view of medicine when he teaches Andrew Weil's fellows, who come from all over the country to learn to integrate allopathic and alternative ways of healing.

ONE PATIENT'S STORY FROM THE UA PROGRAM FOR INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

Looking into Sona Mounet's sparkly eyes and hearing her ready laugh, it's hard to believe she's tried to commit suicide twice. No longer haunted by childhood traumas, heart problems, pain and chronic depression, today the pastel artist feels better at 69 than she did at 40.

Sona credits her turnaround to Judith Cohen of Sekhem Healing, whom she visits every two weeks. Cohen is an RN, and a healer who does Biodynamic Craniosacral therapy. She combines wisdom from shamanic practices and many disciplines to

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do what Mounet calls "magic."

Cohen is a member of Dr. Weil's Integrative Medicine team — a group of practitioners who review patient cases each week. She also helps train and advise the fellows, and contributes to Weil's web-based distance learning program for physicians. When a patient like Mounet is admitted to Weil's program, the case is reviewed by the fellows in a conference of the entire team — with practitioners of Chinese medicine, energy medicine, shamanism, guided imagery, homeopathy, nutrition and counseling.

After three years of benefits from working with one of these fellows and with a guided imagery therapist, Mounet was still suffering from aches and pains like "steel traps," and tension that had her "always waiting for the other shoe to drop." Weil's team recommended she see Cohen.

It was the words "specialist in post-natal and infancy trauma" that gave Mounet the feeling that Cohen might be a fit for her. When Mounet was only 10 days old, her mother was shot to death while nursing her, and she fell from her mother's arms to the floor. Her grandparents put her with a wet nurse, whose own baby died in Mounet's presence. Then as a child she had undiagnosed rheumatic fever, and ended up with

three damaged heart valves.

She was taken out of school. "I've had a lifetime of abandonment and depression," she observes.

"I don't know what Judith did on the first visit," Mounet reflects. "She said it was energy work. I was trembling and then began shaking so badly ... she just held me. She was so compassionate, nurturing and tender."

Cohen explains that Mounet's shaking was the release of "fight or flight" energy that had built up for years. "Little by little," Mounet says, "she has helped me balance myself. I may never get over all of it. But now I can deal with it; it's more on the level of hiccups."

During her sessions, Mounet first reported on her emotional and physical life. "Then Judith loosened my muscles with a wonderful massage. And I used to think that massages were just for rich people!"

Cohen follows up with cranial work, cradling Mounet's head and shifting the cranial "bones," rebalancing the spine and base of the skull. Mounet lies on her back relaxing. "I can feel tingling and warmth — like electric current. I can almost feel the healing power coming down through her hands."

Cohen has had wide and varied experience with the healing arts. After working for years as a trauma nurse, she became a

licensed massage therapist. Her practice led her to follow the mysteries of challenging clients, and she went on to explore energy healing with Rosalyn Bruyere and to study pre-Buddhist Tibetan, Egyptian and Native American understandings of the human energy system. More recently she has studied pre- and perinatal psychological therapeutic work, and is now assisting in various training.

For Cohen, what Mounet calls a "miracle" is something we think cannot occur because it falls outside our linear reality. "The healer or shaman has the ability to see and then work with a person on other than literal levels," says Cohen.

In Mounet's case, her tension, jumpiness and related feelings may have been linked unconsciously with her initial trauma of being thrown to the floor at the moment of losing her mother. "Understanding the cause helps," Mounet says.

Cohen always tries to correlate what is in the body with life experiences. "You can't separate these things," Mounet comments.

Dr. Andrew Weil agrees. He refers patients to energy or spiritual healers when evaluating "overwhelming or terminal diseases, people with mysterious illnesses that do not fit any patterns recognized by allopathic medicine, or people who may have suffered

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'soul loss' as a result of emotional trauma."

Weil points out that scientists are beginning to find evidence that shamanic and energy healing practices work in today's world. One of the places such evidence is gathered is on The University of Arizona campus, at the Center for Frontier Medicine in Biofield Science.

THE UA CENTER FOR FRONTIER MEDICINE

Gary Schwartz, Ph.D., is director of the new NIH-funded Center for Frontier Medicine in Biofield Science, the only institute of its kind in the country. Judith Cohen serves on its national board of directors. Schwartz is a University of Arizona professor of psychology, surgery, medicine, neurology and psychology, and has authored numerous articles and books. His research — controversial in some circles — includes integrating mind-body medicine, energy medicine and spiritual medicine.

In his Human Energy Systems Lab, Schwartz and his team measure the quantity of energy exchanged in various healing practices, such as Johrei, Reiki, vortex healing, Qigong and Native American spiritual healing.

Schwartz believes that everything is alive and evolving, and that energy fields of

human beings are not static. Moreover, he is of the school that believes the brain is merely an antenna or receiver for the larger "Mind."

The Mind exists all through the energy field, and is larger than matter or disease.

One of the studies funded by his center is headed by Allan Hamilton, M.D., a Harvard-trained neurosurgeon who is Chief of Surgery at University Medical Center. His study is measuring the effect of prayer on patients who undergo cardiac surgery.

Another study is headed by Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona, a psychiatrist, author and shamanic practitioner who also is part of the Program for Integrative Medicine. Dr. Mehl-Madrona, who is part Cherokee, has walked in both the mainstream world of medicine and the Native one.

Dr. Mehl-Madrona doesn't refer to himself as a shaman. He believes that shamans are from Native cultures and are trained in the traditional form of an apprenticeship. Nevertheless, he uses Native rituals and techniques that can activate someone's "inner healer." Most alternative practitioners are using their own set of tools to look for a client's life force or healing impulse. Sometimes this involves helping people reach into areas where they aren't particularly comfortable and then being their ally

through a journey of empowerment. In this process, the line between medicine, therapy and spiritual guidance can become blurred — or irrelevant.

Mehl-Madrona differentiates between energy healing, which doesn't require interfacing with the spirit world, and shamanism, where the practitioner interfaces between the human and non-corporeal realms.

He cautions against the tendency to view spiritual Native healing practices as exotic. "People in the healing arts have prayed for patients for thousands of years, alongside medical treatments," he observes. As Paracelsus said, 'God heals; the surgeon bandages the wounds.'"

Perhaps because he sees indigenous healing rituals and practices as natural ones, Mehl-Madrona wants to contribute to a wider acceptance of the spirit world by illustrating its connection to science. "Today's unprovable becomes tomorrow's testable," he predicts.

ONE PATIENT'S STORY FROM THE UA HUMAN ENERGY SYSTEMS LABORATORY

Diane Gleason is one of Dr. Mehl-Madrona's patients, and a participant in his research study — one of the pilot projects funded by Schwartz's center.

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

As patients who are grateful for the new frontier, both Gleason and Mounet caution that the alternative path is a process, not a quick fix. Mounet observes, "It's important for people to learn and not expect an instant cure."

A practitioner from a local tribe points out, "The Medicine Way is a path, and not an easy one. It is a way of seeing all life that asks for respect and patience." Judith Cohen adds, "The shaman is a facilitator for change, not the instrument of it."

In spite of those cautions, many clients report that energy medicine not only can help physical symptoms, but also act as an accelerated form of psychotherapy. Clients can experience a range of reactions and results are usually subtle, taking place over time.

Careful consumers, both Gleason and Mounet looked carefully at various practices and practitioners before making their choices. It can be important to ask about a practitioner's training, philosophy, techniques and experience, as well as about what kind of results to expect and how large an investment might be required. If after such a conversation questions still remain, or you as a consumer do not feel comfortable, that's

probably a sign that you should keep looking.

For Gary Schwartz, being on the research side of the new frontier is not only professionally rewarding, but personally meaningful as well. He is encouraging about the progress we are making. "Science, rather than taking us away from spirituality and healing, is now actually bringing us closer, in a new and convincing way," he says.

OTHER RESEARCH IN THE RELATIONSHIP OF SCIENCE AND THE HEALING ARTS

- The School of Engineering, Princeton University
- Studies by Japanese researcher Masaru Emoto
- HeartMath Institute, California
- Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Stanford University

Clearly this is a time when patients, physicians and researchers are increasingly willing to explore the relationship of science and spirituality. The University of Arizona even hosts a bi-annual conference on the subject.

Schwartz hopes that such dialogues will act as a bridge, bringing science and the heal-

ing arts closer. "We are documenting that energetic and spiritual healing are real and that the biophysics of energy and the metaphysics of spirituality are ultimately two sides of the same coin," he says.

"And that," he concludes, "is cause for celebration and hope."

ENERGY HEALING

"Energy healing is the transfer of energy to a patient. In the shamanic context, this would involve alignment with natural forces (such as the energies of the four directions), plant and animal spirits, and the invisible or spiritual world." — Andrew Weil, M.D.

Shamanic Energy Medicine: Originally from Asia, shamanism is an indigenous or Native form of spiritual medicine that has appeared on every continent and has been practiced for 50,000 to 100,000 years. Many Native people are now working with non-Natives, sharing ceremonial, ritual and healing practices and sometimes training non-Natives who can adapt these practices for modern use. TLM

Pam Hale Trachta, M.A. is a freelance writer, life coach and consultant who practices shamanic energy healing at her home and at Miraval, Life in Balance. Her website is: www.ThroughADifferentLens.com.

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