



Bridging East And West

Interviewed by Melissa Moniz

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Can you describe your practice?

I developed CHI Medical Center in 1993 in Ohio. Basically what I want to do is bridge East and West medicine. I was first trained as a Western doctor because I grew up in Taiwan and we all admired the science. As youngsters, we had always wanted to come to America to learn the best science, and we did, and we got the training. I went through the whole medical training in the Western style.

It taught me a lot, like how to treat acute problems, surgeries, deliver babies, take care of pregnant women and the whole family medicine technique, which was great — but in the middle of the road, some of the medications I was taught to use were not as effective as I wanted. I would say 10 percent to 20 percent of people didn't respond, or some who initially responded built up a tolerance to the medications. I was taught to give a higher dose, but then they got side-effects. So I knew there was something else that needed to be done because there were people who weren't getting better. And I hit a dead end.

I had to find something else to help them, and that's when my medicine approach shifted because there was one acupuncturist who came to Ohio, where I was at the time. He really lit up my mind and opened my opportunity to go into Eastern study. He told me to take the UCLA Extension study — that was the acupuncture course for physicians — and I did. I was very intrigued because the whole room was filled with physicians from all different specialties learning how to do Chinese medicine and even learning how to pronounce the Chinese terminology. I felt, having the ability to read, write and speak Chinese, that this is something I need to learn well in order to help the doctors learn the real wisdom from the East.

I moved to Hawaii three and a half years ago to fulfill my long-term dream of living and working here — the bridge between East and West and spiritual advancement. Since the state of Hawaii does not recognize my acupuncture training from UCLA Extension, I had to take two and a

half years to go through their channel of educational program and licensure requirement, and I received a Hawaii Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine license a year ago. Being fully credentialed, I began to engage myself in the forefront to help bridge East and West medicine, spirituality in medicine as well as music and medicine, in the 21st century.

How do you balance Eastern and Western medicine in your practice and incorporate both?

When a new patient comes in, I go through their extensive history and find out what has been treated with their illness and what the doctors have done to them. I also talk about their diet and lifestyle, and put that together. Western medicine looks into people's biochemistry and pathophysiological level, and it gives me a good picture of what's going on in a person's body. The Western technology helps me deciding how I can direct my Eastern approach. It also helps me to know how well I can help my patient (i.e. the prognosis).

I am an associate clinical professor at the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Department of UH medical school, and that is the Western medicine institute. I am also a clinical professor at the Institute of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

It's interesting that I'm working in both educational institutes. One is Oriental medicine and one Western medicine. I would like to see these two medical modalities merge together so patients can receive full benefit of both modalities. Eventually we want to develop a world-class healing center in Hawaii, so people can come to Hawaii for vacation and get healed at the same time.

What are the most common conditions you treat?

I treat a lot of acute and chronic pain that doesn't respond well to Western medications. I also treat all kinds of internal medicine-type of problems, such as indigestion, anxiety, depression and so on — and allergy is another big one I treat. I use natural allergy elimination technique incorporating applied kinesiology and acupressure/ acupuncture techniques to reprogram the brain, so the brain



Dr. Elizabeth Chen Christenson does harp therapy while her husband Edward Christenson relaxes during his acupuncture session

can recognize the incompatible energies again. This way, when we come in contact with allergen (previously giving us undesirable signs and symptoms), our channels remain open and thus we remain symptom free. This is a very powerful technique. I also frequently treat all variety of women's illnesses, like menstrual problems, PMS problems, post-menopausal problem and so on.

I also treat weight loss, diabetes and addiction problems. So a lot of those things can be cleared with energetic medicine techniques.

What's the difference between a medical acupuncturist and a licensed acupuncturist?

My approach with a patient is very different from a non-MD acupuncturist, because when I look at the person I look at them at a biochemical level, like blood test results, pathology and radiology reports — and that's my Western training.

And then I look at them at an energetic level and combine the two to see how I can help them. So I can prescribe medication if I need to, or if people come in and are already taking pain medication but not getting better, I can do the acupuncture. Instead of eliminating the medication, I can work with the patient and their doctor to adjust the doses. So non-MD licensed acupuncturists are limited in a way because they can't give that medical advice.

Is acupuncture ever painful, or are there any discomforts?

It depends on the severity of illness and how open a person's channel is initially. Some people feel euphoric because of endorphin effect. Some patients can feel the energy moving inside of channel when needle is placed. It is not pain but a sensation which is called Qi sensation in Chinese medicine.

Sometimes heavy smokers, their energy channel are all blocked and they can be very sensitive. But not just smokers, patients with severe illness can be sensitive to needles. Some of them feel a sparkling sensation, but it's a good feeling because that means channel is opening up and Qi is moving.

Even the pain is a good pain because you are moving the obstruction. I instruct my patient to be aware of "healing crisis" within 24 to 48 hours after acupuncture treatment. That means during the healing process one can feel worse before feeling better. In my 10-plus years of experience, a majority of my patients received positive effects of acupuncture. They love the euphoric effect of the endorphin. You can see some of their comments on my website www.chimedicalcenter.com.

This information is provided as educational and is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a physician. For questions, consult your physician or call the Honolulu County Medical Society, of which Dr. Elizabeth Chen Christenson is a member, at 536-6988.