

Fusion of Eastern and Western Medicine

By Ann Ravelo



In the lush green setting of the Ko'olau mountains sits Dr. Elizabeth

Chen Christenson's clinic. A tall, poised Chinese woman, dressed in a white doctor's coat, slacks and beautifully embroidered Chinese slippers, Dr. Christenson greets me at the door. Her smile is wide and welcoming as she ushers me past her entry way which is filled from ceiling to floor with her framed medical certificates, awards and degrees.



Inside her treatment room, she opens the curtains to reveal the breathtaking view, so different from a typical hospital where the patient finds four walls, a table and anatomic posters. Here, one is greeted with a landscape of green mountains and gracefully swaying trees. Immediately, the patient is relaxed and healing can begin.

Healing begins from within. By utilizing a fusion of Eastern medicine, based on Taoist philosophy which dates back 8000 years, and Western medicine, which is only around 150 years old, Dr. Christenson blends the best of both worlds for total patient healing—emotional, spiritual and physical. However, Dr. Christenson insists that the first step in the success of her treatment is that “the patient has to be willing to be open to the experience.”

Born into a family of medical doctors, then going to medical school herself, Dr. Christenson was convinced that Western medicine was the best. She received her medical education in Siena, Italy and served her residency, as Doctor of Pathology, at Mercy Family Practice Center in Toledo. She is also a life-member of the American Medical Association. After practicing medicine in hospitals, Dr. Christenson routinely saw patients whose pain Western medicine could not help. Doctors would try different pain medications and adjust dosages. When all failed, the doctor would

tell these pain-stricken patients that they were sorry, there was nothing they could do; the patients were termed “difficult” patients who just needed to live with their pain. Pharmaceutical companies state that their medicine will work 80% of the time, but what about the 20% of patients who don't respond? Dr. Christenson could not turn away the 20% and, having taken the Hippocratic Oath, felt responsible to find a way to treat these difficult patients and make them feel better.

It was while attending a conference at the Medical College of Ohio that Dr. Christenson was introduced to acupuncture.

The lecturer spoke about the patients whom Western medicine doesn't help, and this reverberated with Dr. Christenson's feelings. She went on to study with a Chinese physician in Washington, D.C. and then continued her education in an acupuncture course at UCLA. At this point Dr. Christenson realized that her medical training had come full circle. It had taken her 20 years to go back to her roots and learn how to blend both Eastern and Western philosophies. By doing so, she became able to enhance and support the body's own intelligence in healing itself. Then Dr. Christenson takes it one step further—she empowers her patients to heal themselves.

Dr. Christenson explains that when we have a blockage in the body the flow is stopped—which causes disease. “Acupuncture unblocks the obstruction – allows the flow – and the body naturally knows what to do. The flow is the Qi – the highest divine knowledge - the bioforce energy.”

In sync with nature, Traditional Chinese Medicine (known in the medical world as TCM) is based on the theory of observing the natural phenomena of the environment.

TCM theory asserts that processes of the human body are interrelated and in constant interaction with the environment. Signs of disharmony help the TCM practitioner to understand, treat and prevent illness and disease.

Acupuncture is based on the Five Element Theory: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water; in Chinese – Jue, Zhi, Gong, Shang and Yu. These in turn are all related to the seasons, climates, our body organs, colors, taste, balanced emotions, imbalanced emotions, sounds, tones, musical notes and the spiritual. Dr. Christenson shares



a chart which explains the elements and how they correlate with one another. She explains, “When you have an adverse reaction to antibiotics, it affects your kidneys and often causes ear infections.” A look at the chart shows that the kidneys and ears are connected under the element Water. By understanding the chart, the acupuncturist is able to determine where the blockage may be and what mothering element needs to be released or suppressed in order to treat the pain. When the chart is explained by Dr. Christenson, the science of it all is so simple it is beautiful.

Dr. Christenson doesn't discredit Western medicine and she praises its advances in technology, such as MRIs, surgery and transplants. “Western medicine serves as proof of what Chinese medicine has understood and practiced for centuries, but has not been able to scientifically conclude,” says Dr. Christenson. Such is the case of a man who received a transplant after a motorcycle accident. The energy of the new organ shifted the man's dietary needs and eating habits. This verified TCM's philosophy of the flowing of the energy, the Qi as it circulates through the body.

“However,” states Dr. Christenson, “Western thought is to get rid of the bad guys, rather than finding the need to support the whole body system.” She maintains that she doesn't treat cancer, but supports the healthy part to unblock the channel. “Any surgery will block a channel. If you don't have good soil – nourishment - that is part of the healing...then, healing will be hampered.” Good soil comes from a healthy environment, healthy relationships and healthy eating. “If you start from a very healthy foundation, you can bounce back quicker, recover quicker,” says Dr. Christenson.

And, if you don't have good soil? Dr. Christenson recommends not only ridding yourself of the illness and pain, but to return to a healthy lifestyle. “Nourish yourself with emotional spiritual food. “What are you watching on TV, or what type of music are you listening to?” asks Dr. Christenson.

With this final question, Dr. Christenson excuses herself for a moment and returns with a therapy harp. She strums just a few strings and explains, “Do you hear that? Immediately, patients who are filled with anxiety are brought to calmness because their spirit hears the harp. Then you can treat them.” Dr. Christenson is also the Director of the Board of Sounding Joy Music Therapy in Hawai'i. She is a Certified Therapeutic Harp Practitioner through the international Harp Therapy Program. The use of harp therapy in hospices is instrumental in easing the inevitable. A patient surrounded by tearful loved ones may find dying difficult and traumatic. But the beautiful spirit of the harp music, “just grounds the whole emotion of the room and patients may find their peaceful place and send their soul,” says Dr. Christenson. With this, she plays “Amazing Grace” on her harp. The winds of Koolau accompany her melodic refrain sending my spirit soaring and my Qi flowing. 🎶

For more information about Dr. Chen Christenson please visit www.chimedicalcenter.com.