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Med school offers Wellness Center

By Tiffany Hill
Advertiser Staff Writer

Embracing the rising demand for complementary and integrative healthcare, the University of Hawai'i's John A. Burns School of Medicine will open a Wellness Center next month.

The group practice, in partnership with modern medicine, will offer nontraditional methods of medicine as well as ancient traditional methods from India and China and teach classes to create a holistic approach to healing and wellness.

The new facility will be open to the general public, and appointments can be made over the phone.

"People are greatly using alternative methods of medicine," said Terry Shintani, associate chair of the practice and creator of the popular Hawaii Diet. "But we want to make sure the services that are available are legit, so that's why the university is getting involved."

According to research headed by Rosanne Harrigan, chair of the Department of Complementary and Alternative Health Care, 78 percent of people in Hawai'i who are disabled from severe, chronic pain use integrative medicine.

The center, located on the medical school's Kaka'ako campus, will offer a variety of integrated therapy services, including acupuncture, massage therapy, music therapy, and nutrition services and classes. In addition, meditation and yoga classes will be taught.

Harrigan said it will eventually add other services and tai chi classes.

"(The services) will be used as adjunctive therapy," said Harrigan. "But we will not stop using traditional methods."

The large one-room center (divided by cubicle barriers) was originally intended by the university to be an exercise center but was unable to open because of a lack of money. However, Harrigan said the center's treadmills and health equipment along with the integration of traditional and nontraditional medical approaches will maximize patients' overall wellness.

Ira Zunin, a primary physician at the Manakai O Malama Integrative Healthcare Group and Rehabilitation Center, said the new center's integrative services are a fresh solution in healthcare.

"Integrative medicine ... is much more than bringing in several providers under one roof," said Zunin. "We have a bigger view about how to provide care ... in improving quality of life and lowering (healthcare) costs.

"Integrative medicine is coming of age. It's not some pipe dream," said Zunin, also a professor at the university. "The economy needs it and Hawai'i needs it."

Both Harrigan and Zunin stressed that integrative medicine should not strictly be classified as alternative medicine as it still includes the technology and methodology of modern medicine.

Emphasis at the center will focus on wellness evaluation, diabetic care, obesity, heart disease and pain management.

The Wellness Center will also incorporate ancient traditional forms of medicine, accentuating the university's ethnic diversity.

Among them is Ayurvedic medicine, derived from India, which uses dietary and herbal techniques to regulate mind-body harmony.

Moxibustion, the process of heating mugwort, a small, spongy herb, will also be available, Harrigan said. The herb increases circulation and relieves pain.

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Elizabeth Chen Christenson, clinical associate professor at the UH medical school, practices the Chinese art of tai chi on the front lawn of the Wellness Center. Tai chi classes will eventually be offered at the center, which opens next month.

Roseanne Harrigan photo

A LOOK AT THE WELLNESS CENTER

Staff: four faculty physicians and an advanced practice nurse

Location: John A. Burns School of Medicine, Kaka'ako campus

Offerings: nontraditional medical practices, ancient medical techniques, and nutrition and wellness classes

More information: call 692-0909 to schedule an appointment