Ancient medicines find favour with Canadians

Melissa Carr, 24 hours
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History was never my favourite study topic. When I was in school for traditional Chinese medicine, I thought it a waste to study the classic textbooks from thousands of years ago. I wondered how on earth would that be relevant to how we treat people today. Why not just learn what herbs to give or which acupuncture points to use for each modern day illness?

But since my student days I have learned again and again the value of the lessons of the past. TCM is at least 2,000 years old, but according to oral legends, this ancient practice perhaps goes back as far as 5,000 years.

Our recent medical approach has placed a strong emphasis on technology and finding the specific target cells, or body chemicals, that result in related symptoms and diseases. This is important and has saved many lives. Rising medical costs and complicated chronic illnesses unresolved by conventional healthcare, however, mean that both the public and the government are looking for alternative options.

Imagine if there was a medical system with sophisticated diagnostic methods that don't require expensive technology. Envision effective treatments with few side effects. Think up an approach that emphasizes the connection between the body, mind, emotions and environment. Visualize practitioners teaching patients about wellness care and disease prevention, thus empowering them. No need to dream as TCM offers just these things, and has for thousands of years.

A long time ago in a country far, far away …

TCM boasts the oldest medical text in the world, dating back between 800 to 200 B.C. It promotes wellness through disease prevention, early diagnosis and prevention of disease progression, and prevention of disease return and treatment of conditions that may have resulted from the illness. Sounds like a great foundation for our medicine today, and the good news is that integrative medicine — taking the best from holistic practices like TCM and combining them with conventional Western medicine — is gaining popularity.

In this country, B.C. is a leader for the adoption of alternative and integrative medicine practices. TCM has been regulated in our province since 2001. Ontario joined in this month with its own regulatory association. B.C. is also the first province to regulate the TCM titles that allow for the prescribing of Chinese herbs.

Stay tuned to find out more ways that this ancient medicine is also a modern medicine with supporting research, current disease management, new treatments, and ability to integrate with conventional therapies.
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Delphine Baumer RAc

Yes Judy! And very interesting, there are A LOT of overlaps between Traditional Chinese Medicine and First Nations Medicine. It is quite remarkable that these ancient systems of medicine have come to similar conclusions even though they come from such distant lands. Great Article Dr. Carr. Thank you for continuing your strong voice in our community.

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Delphine Baumer RAc

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Dr. Melissa Carr  Registered Dr. of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncturist. My motto is "bringing ancient medicine to your modern life"...

Oops! This was my article. The other Melissa Carr writes great articles about life in your 30s. I write about all things health and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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Judy Green

Funny, medicine grows in every forest here in BC. too bad it just isn't recognized - First Nations have been using it for centuries.

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You're right! It is valuable medicine as well. Every effective and safe medicine should have a place. TCM has a strong diagnostic and treatment system, so it has been more widely accepted, especially with regard to acupuncture. I do recommend qualified herbalists to prescribe local herbs. Food is also medicine. TCM recognizes that, as do most indigenous healing practices.