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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

July 12, 2003 Saturday

**The new face of health care;**

**B.C. set an example for the Western world last month by licensing doctors of traditional Chinese medicine. ALEXANDRA GILL goes under the needle to check out a popular new treatment: 'facial rejuvenation'**

**BYLINE:** ALEXANDRA GILL

**SECTION:** FOCUS; MEDICINE; Pg. F6

**LENGTH:** 1974 words

An **acupuncture** facelift looks far more painful than it actually is. Or at least that's what I keep telling myself as the doctor pokes another needle in my ear. Ouch!

This ancient Chinese beauty treatment requires nearly 100 needles, far more than the dozen or so used for most **acupuncture**. It is also nearly twice as expensive ($120 per session) and time-consuming (1.5 hours). But the results of a 12-treatment series - reduced wrinkles, firmer muscle tone, improved collagen production and circulation - are supposed to be better than Botox.

Each year, thousands of Canadians turn to **acupuncture** as an alternative treatment for everything from migraines to multiple sclerosis. But as the ancient healing art becomes ever more mainstream, many are now discovering that **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** (TCM)has cosmetic applications as well.

Last month, British Columbia became the first province in Canada (and the first jurisdiction in the western world) to confer professional status - and responsibility - on the full sweep of traditional **Chinese** **therapies**.

Acupuncture has been regulated in B.C. since 1999 (and is also regulated in Alberta and Quebec). But under the new legislation, all TCM practitioners - including acupuncturists and those who work with medicinal herbs, energy-control therapy and rehabilitation exercises such as qigong - must now be licensed by the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupunc- turists, a self-regulatory body created by the provincial government three years ago.

"This is one of our prouder moments," says Sindi Hawkins, B.C.'s minister of Health Planning, who presided over the licensing ceremony in Vancouver. "This is a profession from Eastern medicine that's more than 4,000 years old and we're the first jurisdiction in the West to recognize it. People here wanted that choice. We wanted to ensure they had a safe, quality choice."

Chinese medicine isn't covered in the province's medical services plan, although a growing number of private extended health plans now include it.

The 392 practitioners who received licences at the June ceremony will be regulated in much the same way as physicians, nurses and massage therapists. They must complete specific education requirements and a series of safety courses, pass licensing examinations, carry at least $1-million in malpractice insurance and meet professional conduct standards.

More than half - 230 - were licensed as Doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine. (The other titles granted were Registered Acupuncturist, Registered TCM Practitioner and Registered TCM Herbalist.)

The doctors, who are trained in the entire panoply of traditional Chinese therapies, must prove that they have completed five years of TCM education at a recognized institute. (Practitioners must study for four years, while acupuncturists and herbalists need three years of study.)

Dr. Tahmineh Nikookar is one of these newly licensed doctors. Born in Iran, with a master's degree in chemical engineering, she became interested in Chinese medicine after her husband had acupuncture to treat a shoulder problem. The results, says Dr. Nikookar, were amazing. She became fascinated with the philosophy, and studied at the Tai Shan medical college in China, where she received a degree in Chinese medicine, and at the Canadian College of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine in Victoria, where she obtained a diploma in herbology.

Since starting her Vancouver practice in 1995, Dr. Nikookar has become one of the few Canadian practitioners of Chinese medicine to specialize in facial rejuvenation. She says the procedure - which combines acupuncture, energy work and herbs - is thousands of years old but went out of fashion in China when the Communists came to power.

Vanity may be the primary reason her clients see her, but Dr. Nikookar says the procedure is more than just cosmetic. "It treats the whole body, from the inside out." As with all Chinese therapies, facial rejuvenation is based on the principle of *chi*, the invisible vital energy that, according to traditional Chinese medicine, flows through organs and along internal pathways, or meridians.

Using energy work, herbal creams and dozens of acupuncture needles, some so tiny they must be handled with tweezers, the procedure helps stimulate the smooth circulation of energy throughout the body, with an emphasis on the face, and improve natural collagen production. A series of at least seven treatments is recommended in order to attain the full benefits, which could include firmer facial muscles, tighter pores, the reduction of fine lines, brighter eyes and glowing skin.

Before we get started with the needles, she takes me through a series of questions about my medical history. Dr. Nikookar will not treat people with high blood pressure. "It brings all the yang to the head." Nor will she treat anyone who has had prior facial plastic surgery. "In case something has gone wrong and I get blamed."

She inspects my tongue, takes my pulse and asks me to remove my clothes and lie down under a sheet on the examination table.

"Close your eyes," she instructs, as she waves a small wooden pendulum over the length of my body to check my energy flow. I take a quick peek, and see it wobbling erratically over my stomach.

"You are very unbalanced," Dr. Nikookar sighs.

Most of Dr. Nikookar's patients find her through an ad in the Yellow Pages, or through word of mouth. Luckily for them, she is skilled and highly qualified. Not everyone is so fortunate. You might recall the Toronto acupuncture clinic that was closed down last winter after more than 20 patients were infected with a rare skin disease. That sort of scenario is far less likely to happen in B.C., now that province-wide standards ensure that practitioners abide by proper infection-control practices.

Of the 554 practitioners who applied for the new licences, 162 were denied. Sixteen of the failed applicants had tried to pass off fraudulent credentials.

If patients encounter unsafe or improper conduct, they can lodge a complaint with the College.

The professional designation of TCM in B.C. could set a precedent for other provinces. In Alberta, the Society of Traditional Chinese Medicine has submitted an application for regulation to the Health Professions Advisory Board, which is now studying the proposal before making recommendations.

Ontario may be slower to follow. In a recent report to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario expressed "strong reservations" about the creation of a self-regulatory body for TCM, although it supports the practice of acupuncture as a treatment for pain.

"I know the world is watching us," says Ms. Hawkins. "I think that it's important for other governments in Canada to consider what we've done. I think they'll see that this balance of east meets west can co-exist and complement one another."

Western medicine is comparable to sending in a SWAT team, says Dr. Randy Wong, registrar of the B.C. College and former chief executive officer of Mission Memorial Hospital.

"Eastern medicine, for lack of a better analogy, is more like sending in a social worker. The situation is diffused, and work is done on the root causes of illness so you can address the problem before having to send in a SWAT team to blow it away."

Dr. Wong agrees that a SWAT team is still sometimes needed. But he insists the two schools of medicine can be complementary.

"It all goes back to the ancient philosophy of Chinese medicine, which aims to restore the body's balance. If your body is balanced, you can live to a ripe old age. It won't make a 50-year-old man look 18 again, but it can help restore your energy."

One Vancouver woman swears her facial acupuncture worked wonders. The 58-year-old artist, who asked that her name not be published because she hasn't told any of her friends about the procedure, began seeing Dr. Nikookar for facial treatments last year. She wanted to do something about the fine lines around her eyes. "But I didn't want my face cut with a knife," she explains.

She says she began seeing results after the first visit. She carried through with a series of 15 treatments, and now continues to see Dr. Nikookar for maintenance sessions every month and uses her herbal cleansers and face creams daily. The difference in her appearance, she says, is night and day.

"My skin is tighter. I don't have jowls anymore - and no crow's feet. My eyelids are firmer. And the little lines around my lips are gone. My skin tone is much brighter. I don't even wear makeup anymore. It's amazing what she can do."

Despite her positive experience, she says her friends wouldn't understand why she's doing it. "[Chinese medicine] is becoming more popular, but a lot of people are still skeptical."

I'm skeptical too, as I lie on the examination table in the dark feeling like a human pincushion. Dr. Nikookar has pierced nearly 100 needles into my head, face, hands, legs and feet. And now she's left me alone to let the energy start flowing.

The needles are supposed to help me relax, but I feel restless. When Dr. Nikookar comes back five minutes later to check on me, I tell her the needles don't hurt, but it feels as though all the tension in my body has gone straight to my backside.

The concerned look on her face is not comforting. She rubs her hands together, stretches out her palms and begins slowly waving them across my body. "There is a big blockage here," she says, pausing above my abdomen. She goes to work on the area, trying to draw out the tension with her hands.

Suddenly, my body responds and starts lifting up toward her hands. I swear I'm not controlling it. I peer down my nose past pins the size of walrus tusks and watch as she continues doing her energy work until my abdomen settles back down onto the bed. I don't know how she did it, but the tension is gone.

The same thing happens after she removes the needles and begins massaging my head to drain the toxins out of my lymph system. "Why are you moving your head like that?" she asks, as it rocks side to side.

Uh, I thought she was doing that.

It's another blockage. (In my brain?)

When the procedure is complete, I don't see dramatic differences. Sure, my eyes look a bit brighter, the skin under my chin is slightly more taut and my normally pale face is shining with an unnaturally healthy glow.

What I do notice, however, is how my body feels - blissfully relaxed and slightly wobbly, as if I have just emerged from a warm bubble bath. I think I'm beginning to understand the ancient Chinese secret. If you feel this good, who cares about wrinkles?

*Alexandra Gill is a feature writer for The Globe and Mail.*

**Complementary care by numbers**

The demand for complementary health care is booming. In 2000, Canadians spent approximately $500-million on natural health-care products.

Within a six-month period in 1999, approximately 30 per cent of British Columbians and Albertans, and 25 per cent of people from Ontario, had been to an alternative-care practitioner at least once. Although those numbers do not specify which type of alternative treatments they sought, TCM represents one of the most widely used forms of complementary medicine, along with massage and naturopathy.

Who's most likely to consult complementary and alternative health practitioners? Female patients (21 per cent of Canadian women have had a consultation, compared with 17 per cent of men), and people aged 25 to 54. (About 23 per cent of Canadians in that age group say they've turned to alternative care, compared with 16 per cent of those 55 and over, and 14 per cent in the 12 to 24 age group.)

*Sources: Non-Prescription Drug Manufacturers Association, Berger Population Health Monitor, Canadian Community Health Survey*

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

January 2, 2007 Tuesday

**Ontario regulates tradition;**

**Law sets up body to oversee practitioners of Chinese medicine and acupuncture**

**BYLINE:** UNNATI GANDHI

**SECTION:** HEALTH; Pg. A11

**LENGTH:** 817 words

A new law regulating **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine and acupuncture** will protect Ontarians from the dangers of the current free-for-all that is plaguing the ancient practice, many long-time practitioners say.

But others contend the legislation - passed by Queen's Park and put into effect Dec. 20 - will puncture a vibrant and ballooning alternative medical therapy industry that has worked hard to earn the trust of Canadians in recent decades.

"It is a very complex issue," said Cedric Cheung, a doctor of **Chinese** **medicine** in London and president of the **Chinese** **Medicine and Acupuncture** Association of Canada. "But it is an issue that is being addressed for the protection and the safety of the general Canadian."

Royal assent for the controversial Bill 50 launched the process of creating a self-regulating professional body that will be known as the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario - similar to those that govern doctors, nurses, chiropractors and physiotherapists.

The college will be responsible for setting standards, licensing practitioners, establishing disciplinary procedures for malpractice or misconduct and setting up a complaints committee that will look at grievances.

"Previously, there was no restriction on who could practise traditional Chinese medicine in Ontario, or who could call themselves a practitioner. So it comes down to public protection," said A. G. Klei, a spokesman for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Dr. Cheung, who has been practising the technique of inserting and manipulating needles into meridian points on the body for nearly 40 years, says many of the services being offered in Ontario in recent years have become very lax, too often resulting in serious injuries.

"There was a patient being treated by a practitioner with a reused disposable needle. They don't throw it away, they keep it and reuse it. Then there are cases of lung punctures with the needle. [In another case, a] needle wasn't inserted properly in the leg and it caused swelling because it was inserted in an artery."

Because the practice was unregulated, there was no way for injured parties to file a complaint, and no one has successfully sued for malpractice.

Although the government expects it will be two to three years until the college is established, Dr. Cheung is glad to see that the process, for which he has been lobbying for more than 20 years, is finally under way. It not only protects Ontarians who are increasingly turning to alternative forms of therapy, but it also "is an official recognition of Chinese medicine, the whole regimen," he says.

Ontario joins British Columbia as the only provinces to regulate TCM and acupuncture. Two other provinces, Alberta and Quebec, regulate only acupuncture. About 48 U.S. states, along with England and Thailand, also have some type of regulation of Chinese medicine similar to those put into effect by Bill 50.

The college will be responsible for establishing different classes of Chinese medicine practitioners to avoid having practitioners wage a turf war with chiropractors and physiotherapists for exclusive rights to practise acupuncture. The classes would differentiate between medical doctors of traditional Chinese medicine, with advanced education, and practitioners with a general education in traditional medicine.

Kin Wong, who has been running his family's South China Herbs Market in Toronto for the past 16 years, says the legislation will severely harm the way in which he can help patients because he cannot claim to be a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, diagnose illnesses, or prescribe remedies.

Mr. Wong, 37, learned the trade from his father, who was taught by his grandfather.

Canadians are aware that many of the herbs used in Chinese medicine aren't scientifically tested, he says - people choose to go into shops such as his.

"I'm more than willing to put a sign up in my window that says these medicines have not been tested and that people are venturing into uncharted territory," Mr. Wong says.

He is worried that the red tape that will come with the college will scare many traditional Chinese medicine practitioners out of their profession and will mark the end of the industry "in a few years.

Paul Jang, a Toronto acupuncturist who is a strong supporter of the legislation, agrees that the new rules will take a toll on the industry. Of the roughly 3,000 practitioners across Ontario, Mr. Jang estimates only 800 will be qualified enough to become licensed under new regulations because many of those currently practising do it part-time and don't have more than a year of specialized training.

"The people who don't like Bill 50 are the ones who are scared they won't be able to practise any more. The ones with the right qualifications have nothing to worry about," he said through a translator in his clinic.

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

June 22, 1999 Tuesday

**B.C. recognizes Chinese cures Ancient herbal remedies likely to be covered eventually, Premier says**

**BYLINE:** Robert Matas British Columbia Bureau

**SECTION:** NATIONAL NEWS; Pg. A5

**LENGTH:** 302 words

**DATELINE:** Vancouver

British Columbia has become the first province in the country to recognize **traditional** **Chinese** **medicines** as legitimate medical treatment.

Premier Glen Clark announced yesterday that the province is creating a new College of **Traditional** **Chinese** **Medicine and Acupuncture** Practitioners of British Columbia to regulate the therapies and licence acupuncturists.

"Not too long from now, you will be able to go to a TCM [traditional Chinese medicine] practitioner for a prescription and take it to a herbal pharmacy to be filled," said Vancouver lawyer Mason Loh, who has been appointed to head the new college.

Herbal medicines and acupuncture will be available in the province only from qualified practitioners who are approved by the college, Mr. Loh said yesterday in an interview. "From a public safety point of view, this is very significant," he said.

B.C. currently has about 700 acupuncturists and about 500 also prescribe herbal remedies. An additional 200 people in B.C. prescribe herbal medicines without using acupuncture.

The new regulations do not involve any government funding and the services are not covered by the provincial medical services plan. But Mr. Clark said he expected the government to cover the Chinese therapies once the field is properly regulated.

He said the government has not yet discussed whether the therapies should be covered. "I think at the end of the day, the more emphasis we can put on wellness, and this kind of medicine, the more money we save in our acute-care sickness model," Mr. Clark said.

A spokesman for the B.C. Medical Association, Dr. Brian Dixon-Warren, said he was pleased that practitioners would be regulated but he was concerned that the regulatory body only includes "true-believers" and does not include people with traditional academic and research credentials.

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

March 31, 2008 Monday

National Edition

**B.C. assumes coverage of acupuncture costs**

**BYLINE:** The Canadian Press

**SECTION:** NATIONAL NEWS; IN BRIEF; Pg. A8

**LENGTH:** 77 words

**DATELINE:** Victoria

B.C. will become the first Canadian province tomorrow to cover **acupuncture** for those receiving premium assistance on the provincial Medical Services Plan.

Health Minister George Abbott says **acupuncture** is an effective way to treat or manage a variety of health conditions.

B.C. Qualified Acupuncturists and **Traditional Chinese Medicine** Practitioners Association president Dr. Harvey Hu hopes the move will increase understanding of the benefits of **acupuncture.**

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

May 25, 2010 Tuesday

**Trust me, this won't hurt a bit**

**BYLINE:** SERIOUSLY?

**SECTION:** GLOBE LIFE; SERIOUSLY? / DR. ADAM CHEN; Pg. L4

**LENGTH:** 723 words

*We ask the experts to settle common questions we've all wondered about.*

QUESTION

When should I consider using **acupuncture**? How do the needles work? How painful are the needles? What are the risks of **acupuncture**?

ANSWER

According to practitioners of **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine, acupuncture** is an important therapy for every person's overall well-being. They use it for the prevention and treatment of a long list of medical conditions including migraines, insomnia, stress, depression, fertility issues, pain, neurological conditions and shingles, as well as drug, alcohol and smoking addictions.

Aside from these conditions, they recommend it for everyone (regardless of health status) twice a year between fall and winter, and in spring and summer as well-being maintenance. They suggest that these seasonal adjustments are important because the body can have a difficult time adapting to a new season, making it more vulnerable to diseases and infections. That's why, they say, you see a spike in flu cases in late winter and early spring.

The basis of acupuncture is simple. In Chinese medicine, it's believed that in a healthy body, energy flows through channels smoothly. If that energy flow is disrupted, the person may become ill or suffer from pain. Each person's body has more than 300 acu-points where energy flow can be disrupted. Acupuncturists determine the disruptions by taking the patient's pulse, reading his or her tongue and feeling his or her muscle tone. Needles are placed at the disrupted acu-points to resume the energy flow, which is thought to improve the patient's well-being.

Some research studies have suggested that stimulating acu-points triggers the brain to produce many different compounds - such as endorphins - which improve an individual's disease condition or reduce pain.

Because no two individuals are identical and their conditions are different, the required frequency of acupuncture treatments ranges between patients. Through an initial assessment of the patient, the practitioner will determine the best treatment plan.

The degree of acupuncture's effectiveness also differs between patients. For some, the treatment reduces symptoms, and for others it is believed to cure the condition.

Acupuncture clinical trials are challenging because it's difficult to come up with a proper placebo; however the results are intriguing. Researchers often compare "real acupuncture" with a control group called a placebo or "sham" in which non-traditional sites are used, or the needles retract into the handles when pressed against the body so they don't penetrate the skin.

A double-blind, controlled study in Australia revealed that inserting needle to a single traditional point (the forearm, close to the wrist) reduced post-surgery nausea, while the sham therapy did not have the same effect.

However, in a recent German study involving headache patients, the participants getting the "real acupuncture" reported feeling only slightly better than the group who received the placebo. It seems that pressing a faux needle against the skin may be enough to produce the desired effect. Or, there is simply a strong "placebo effect" to acupuncture treatment itself.

Nonetheless, acupuncture is considered a safe and recognized practice that is increasingly being used alongside Western medicine. A properly trained acupuncturist will place a needle gently so that it is painless, or the pain is no worse than a mosquito bite.

Like most treatments, however, there are risks if it is administered incorrectly. There are rare instances when a practitioner inserts a needle improperly, puncturing a patient's organ or causing serious internal bleeding. The other risk is contracting a bacterial or viral infection through the needles. This can be avoided by using disposable needles and using the right technique (which most reputable practitioners do). To be safe, ask your acupuncturist at your first assessment about his or her training and experience to confirm the quality of care.

If you're considering acupuncture, a good first step is to speak to your family physician for more information about how acupuncture and Western treatment can work together to improve your health.

*Dr. Adam Chen is associate*

*director of acupuncture at the*

*Rehab and Wellbeing Centre of Mount Sinai in Toronto.*

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

January 31, 2012 Tuesday

**Can acupuncture help you get pregnant?;**

**Studies looking at IVF patients using the treatment to conceive have had mixed results and raised some questions**

**BYLINE:** AMY NORTON, Reuters

**SECTION:** GLOBE LIFE; FERTILITY; Pg. L6

**LENGTH:** 744 words

**Acupuncture** may help some women conceive through in vitro fertilization (IVF), a new analysis of past research concludes. But the true benefit in the clinical setting, if any, remains unclear.

The technique has been used for millennia in **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine,** for a whole range of ills.

Ten years ago, a study in Germany was the first clinical trial to report that **acupuncture** seemed to improve pregnancy rates in women undergoing IVF. But since then research has turned up mixed results.

"I counsel women that the literature is not convincing yet that [acupuncture] helps you get pregnant," said Frederick Licciardi, who heads the New York University Fertility Center's mind/body program.

At the centre, women can opt for acupuncture sessions, yoga and other "mind/body" services, but that's aimed at easing stress and promoting general "wellness" - not at boosting IVF success, said Dr. Licciardi.

Clinical trials on the issue so far have been small, and often of questionable quality.

So for the new study, reported in the journal Fertility and Sterility, Chinese researchers conducted what's called a meta-analysis - where researchers combine the results of past studies to try to get an idea of the overall picture.

Cui Hong Zheng and colleagues at Tongji Medical College pooled the results of 24 small clinical trials testing the effects of acupuncture in women undergoing IVF.

The trials varied widely: Many tested needle acupuncture, some electro-acupuncture and some included laser acupuncture.

The studies also differed in what they used as a "control."

In many trials, IVF patients either received acupuncture or nothing. In others, researchers used a form of "placebo" acupuncture such as applying blunt needles to the skin surface. Some researchers used real needles, but stimulated points not related to fertility, according to traditional medicine.

Dr. Zheng's team found that overall, women who had acupuncture had a slightly higher pregnancy rate than women who did not have the therapy - but no higher birth rate.

The results looked a little different, though, when the researchers excluded five studies that used blunt needles as a control.

When those trials were dropped, women in the remaining studies who received acupuncture fared a little better: 41 per cent became pregnant, versus 37 per cent of those who did not have acupuncture.

Three of those trials also looked at birth rates. Of women who received acupuncture, 35 per cent had a baby, compared with 25 per cent of women in the control groups.

According to Dr. Zheng's team, the findings suggest that the blunt-needle acupuncture used in some trials is not a truly "inactive" placebo, and may actually have effects similar to the real thing.

And that, the researchers say, may explain why those studies failed to find benefits from real acupuncture.

But Dr. Licciardi - who stressed that he is "not anti-acupuncture" - was unconvinced.

One of the big problems with the analysis, according to Dr. Licciardi, is that it combined studies that were all looking at very different things: different types of acupuncture, different controls, and different timing of the acupuncture sessions.

He was also skeptical of the researchers' choice to drop certain trials, which then essentially gave them "the results they wanted."

In the bigger context of acupuncture research, finding a good control has long been a problem.

The gold standard for proving that any medical treatment works is to randomly assign patients to receive the treatment or a placebo, with neither the patients nor the researchers knowing who is getting the real thing.

If a trial is testing a drug, it is easy enough to give the control group sugar pills.

But with acupuncture, it has been hard to find a widely accepted placebo version - one that has no, or at least minimal, physiological effects but is convincing enough that patients think they're getting acupuncture.

The bottom line, according to Dr. Licciardi, is that no one yet knows if acupuncture can really make a difference in IVF success. But if a woman wants to try it simply to feel better or de-stress, there would be little harm.

As for why acupuncture would help a woman get pregnant with IVF, no one is sure of that either.

There's some evidence that needle stimulation may improve blood flow to the uterus. And researchers are looking at whether acupuncture might make the uterine wall more receptive to the embryo.

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

April 15, 2006 Saturday

**Ancient medicine for a modern problem;**

**Today, one in six couples can't conceive. In vitro is expensive and doesn't always work. So some are turning to traditional Chinese treatments such as acupuncture. And as, LESLIE GRANT TIMMINS reports, finding themselves on fertile ground**

**BYLINE:** LESLIE GRANT TIMMINS

**SECTION:** FOCUS; HEALTH; Pg. F9

**LENGTH:** 1242 words

'Our GP couldn't tell us why we weren't getting pregnant," says Shannon Kush, a 31-year-old student of sign language and deaf studies in Vancouver.

Ms. Kush and her husband, Garrett, a chiropractor, have a four-year-old daughter, but after two years of trying to conceive another child and failing, they were considered to have "unexplained infertility."

A friend recommended **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** and Ms. Kush reluctantly decided to try it. After three months of **acupuncture** and herb treatments, she was pregnant.

Today, one in six couples in North America is infertile and 15 to 20 per cent of them will never know why. Add to this the fact that women are delaying childbearing to pursue careers and that Western medical treatments offer women aged 35 to 39 only a 30-per-cent chance of conceiving, and it's not surprising that there's a boom in other kinds of medicine. Some fertility clinics in Canada are now recommending **acupuncture** to their patients.

*Chi* (pronounced chee), or energy, is the basis of Chinese medicine. An imbalance of *chi* at any point in the body's system can cause symptoms or disease. To correct an imbalance, herbs and acupuncture are prescribed. Supporters say traditional Chinese medicine is non-toxic and relatively affordable compared with Western reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), which costs on average of $10,000 and more.

"We couldn't afford in vitro," Ms. Kush says candidly. She had already tried a fertility drug for six months and undergone surgeries for endometriosis, a condition in which the lining of the uterus attaches outside the organ, causing scarring.

Although skeptical of the theory of Chinese medicine and terrified of needles, she decided to try the treatment. The herbal mixtures "tasted like dirt," she says, but after only a month of taking them and having acupuncture treatments, she saw changes. "My nails weren't splitting any more and my hair stopped falling out. After a couple of months, my PMS lightened. My menstrual cramps, which usually had me curled in a fetal position on the bed at least a day a month, went away."

Now pregnant, Ms. Kush is due to give birth in July.

She was treated by Lorne Brown, a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine. "In Western medicine, PMS is considered to be normal and isn't associated with infertility," Dr. Brown says, "but in Chinese medicine it indicates a subtle imbalance that needs to be corrected."

Hair loss, which suggests prolonged stress, is also associated with infertility. "If the stress is reduced and the *chi* is able to flow freely," he explains, "all parts of the body will be nourished, including the hair and nails."

In treating infertility, Dr. Brown follows the principle that you must "nourish the soil before planting the seed"- improving the overall health of the reproductive organs in order to optimize conception. "Ideally, I treat women for about three cycles with acupuncture and Chinese herbal mixtures to regulate their menstrual periods and balance their hormones," he says. "The quality of the egg and the health of the baby are influenced by the woman's health during this time."

Dr. Brown refers to recent medical studies showing that acupuncture can increase blood flow to the ovaries and uterus. "This improves the quality of the eggs and thickens the uterine lining, making it more receptive to implantation."

He treats patients who are trying to conceive naturally as well as those who are preparing for IVF and other reproductive technologies.

It was a combination of IVF and acupuncture that helped Brenda Swartlikoff, 38. She and her husband, Jason, had been trying to have a child for more than five years. After her first IVF embryo transfer, Ms. Swartlikoff suffered a miscarriage. After two more unsuccessful transfers, she tried insemination, but no luck.

"Somewhere in there we began adoption procedures," she says. "I also decided to see a Chinese-medicine doctor."

After several months of acupuncture treatments alone, Ms. Swartlikoff tried another IVF and became pregnant. She soon noticed some changes. "Within a month of starting the acupuncture, my cycle went from 33-32-31 days right to 28 days and it remained like that through my entire in vitro process. And I felt so relaxed after each treatment, like I'd been to a spa."

Just over a week ago, she gave birth to a healthy girl.

Although Western science has just begun to investigate the 2,500-year-old traditions of Chinese medicine, studies support Brenda Swartlikoff's positive experience.

"Acupuncture is one of the hottest things in the infertility field right now," says Alice Domar, an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School and director of the Domar Center for Complementary Healthcare at Boston IVF, a large fertility clinic.

"From a scientific point of view, the research on acupuncture and infertility is tantalizing," Dr. Domar says. "A 2002 study by [Dr. Wolfgang] Paulus got worldwide attention and showed a lovely increase in pregnancy rate using acupuncture during in vitro fertilization cycles."

Published in the prestigious medical journal Fertility and Sterility, this study compared two groups of 40 women aged 21 to 43. One group received acupuncture to relax the uterus, the other did not. Twice as many of the women who received acupuncture became pregnant.

But Dr. Domar remains cautious. "Other studies have not been as supportive of the hypothesis and suggest it may be a placebo effect. We need more data."

Stephen Hudson, an obstetrician and gynecologist, and medical director of the Victoria Fertility Clinic on Vancouver Island, has no such reservations. "I recommend all of my patients who are undergoing treatments such as IVF consider acupuncture. I think it relaxes them. Anything that positively affects your mental and physical health is going to help you improve the odds of getting and staying pregnant."

*Leslie Grant Timmins is a freelance writer based in Vancouver.*

**It takes two**

A year ago, Tom Nadeau of Montreal was diagnosed with male infertility factor. A salesman, he attributes his very low sperm count and motility to the heat and constriction of long work hours in his car every summer.

Male infertility factor accounts for one-third of infertility in couples. Female infertility accounts for another third, but most assisted reproduction technology is aimed at women.

Both Mr. Nadeau (not his real name) and his wife, Joan, opted to be treated by Aina Zhang, a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine - Ms. Nadeau, 38, to optimize her general health and Mr. Nadeau, 33, for infertility.

Following Dr. Zhang's advice, Mr. Nadeau reduced his work hours, changed his diet, drank teas made of specially prescribed Chinese herbs and underwent once-a-week acupuncture treatments. "I was skeptical at first," he says, "but now I like the Chinese philosophy of balancing everything. It takes a while, but the results are there."

After a year of seeing Dr. Zhang, Mr. Nadeau's semen analysis shows normal levels. A 2005 study published in the medical journal Fertility and Sterility backs up his experience. It showed significant increases in the number and motility of sperm in men who had acupuncture treatments.

Three weeks ago, the Nadeaus used intrauterine insemination to try to conceive. The procedure, in which sperm is injected directly into the uterus, requires healthy sperm. For Tom Nadeau, it was no problem.

- *Leslie Grant Timmins*

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

January 26, 2002 Saturday

**Research spurred by the lucrative herbal market**

**BYLINE:** Laszlo Buhasz

**SECTION:** TRAVEL; Pg. T5

**LENGTH:** 549 words

In Asia, the race is on to tap into the multibillion-dollar Western market for **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** (TCM).

In Singapore, a predominantly ethnic Chinese island, plans are afoot to pour millions of dollars into university programs and research to scientifically prove, and improve, the efficacy of **acupuncture,** traditional health foods, medicinal wines and herbal treatments.

Taiwan joined the race last year by unveiling a $100-million (U.S.) five-year-plan to be a "TCM Technology Island" by 2006.

And Hong Kong is aiming to establish itself as a forerunner in the scientific study of traditional Chinese medicine by 2009. Last year, the city saw the launch of an Institute of Chinese Medicine, funded by a consortium of organizations that includes the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which runs part of the city's huge gambling industry. Like other new bodies in the region, the institute is subjecting age-old remedies to the scientific rigour of clinical trials.

Ping-Chung Leung, an orthopedic surgeon and chairman of the Hong Kong institute's management committee, says the trials are following procedures sanctioned by the National Institutes of Health in the United States and the World Health Organization.

Leung, who is heading up the institute's research on a traditional medicine that is showing great promise in treating diabetic foot ulcers, says the issue is not traditional versus Western medicine.

"We have to be open-minded and willing to consider alternatives that are effective and safe in treating patients," says Leung, whose father was a herbalist. "We're not about to give up the practice of Western medicine, just trying to add to the arsenal of treatments."

Other priority projects for the institute include a treatment for hepatitis B, a study to see if a preparation of three common Chinese herbs reduces asthmatic children's dependence on steroids, and the testing of a herbal supplement that may reduce the side effects of chemotherapy in patients with cancer.

Leung and other experts in the field believe that scientific evidence to support the efficacy of traditional remedies and a U.S.-style patent system to protect medicines resulting from those findings will bring in much-needed income for the region.

The trials are also aimed at testing the safety of TCM treatments. Western doctors have expressed concern about the toxicity levels found in some herbal remedies and about their interaction with prescription drugs. Serious questions have also been raised after tests in Western countries have found that some imported Asian herbal medicines are poorly made and adulterated with dangerous substances.

While Leung and others are working to bring traditional remedies into the modern scientific world, some practitioners are wary of academic attention, fearing that the Western medical establishment wants to eliminate competition from remedies it considers unproven.

In the end, a new generation of researchers in Asia and the West would probably agree with David Eisenberg of Harvard University, who addressed 600 Chinese health-care professionals attending a conference on alternative medicine last summer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"Real gold does not fear even the hottest fire," said Eisenberg, quoting a Chinese proverb.

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

December 28, 1996 Saturday

**Alternative treatments gaining ground Medical establishment taking notice as more Canadians turn to naturopathy, homeopathy**

**BYLINE:** BY WALLACE IMMEN Medical Reporter

**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. A3

**LENGTH:** 1026 words

East may not have met west this year, but alternative treatments made remarkable advances toward joining Canada's medical mainstream.

Frustrated by the failures of medicine to cope with AIDS, cancer and such mystery illnesses as chronic fatigue, Canadians are looking to therapies including naturopathy, homeopathy, **acupuncture** and **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** in increasing numbers.

At least 3.3 million Canadians a year sought treatments outside the medical establishment last year, spending at least $1-billion that was not reimbursed by provincial health plans in the process, according to Statistics Canada.

The amount spent on vitamins and food supplements is rising by 20 per cent a year and exporters of Chinese herbal medicine report they expect sales to double by the year 2000.

Critics have always contended that treatments outside the medical realm are not backed by careful scientific research and that their practitioners are generally not regulated.

Now all that may be about to change. Among changes this year:

Across Canada, naturopaths, acupuncturists and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine began making bids to be regulated as medical professionals;

Vancouver Hospital established an alternative-medicine clinic to conduct research on the effectiveness of Chinese, Ayurvedic and native treatments;

Vancouver Hospital also opened a Healing Touch Centre, to do therapies aimed at balancing energy fields in the body. About 1,000 professionals have now trained in a similar technique, Therapeutic Touch, which has been recognized as a treatment by the College of Nurses of Ontario;

And researchers at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto announced plans to conduct clinical trials of four Chinese herbal remedies to treat psychiatric conditions.

To meet the growing demand, several alternative medical schools this year increased their enrolments and moved to larger facilities.

"There is so much demand from students who want to become naturopaths we plan to double our enrolment over the next four years," said Audrey Adams-White, president of the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. In September, the college opened classrooms and labs for 200 students on two floors of an office tower at Yonge Street and Eglinton Avenue in downtown Toronto.

"We're really achieving liftoff as a profession," commented David Sleight, the school's incoming president, at a $500-a-plate black tie dinner that raised $1.2-million for the new facility.

In 20 years, the number of naturopaths in Ontario has risen from four to 250 and Mr. Sleight said that number is expected to double again within five years. Many naturopaths, homeopaths, and specialists in Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture have begun to describe their treatment as complementary to mainstream medical care. They attempt boost restorative systems to let the body do its own healing. They say patients are coming to them because medicine can't cure their ills or they believe drugs and surgery are too invasive.

"Essentially, complementary medicine is an attempt by patients to get some control over their bodies," said Dr. David Ostrow, who headed an advisory board of doctors at Vancouver Hospital that approved establishment of the Tzu Chi Institute within the hospital.

"Naturopaths have been organized and have had a coherent voice," Ms. Adams-White said. The practice, which was established in 1902, accredits only one school in Toronto and three in the United States. To get an ND, a degree in naturopathic medicine, requires taking a four-year graduate program that includes 4,000 hours of medical training. An Ontario committee has heard applications that support including naturopaths under the Drugless Practitioner's Act and a ruling is expected soon from the Health Ministry.

In April, British Columbia, where at least 20 per cent of people use alternative therapists, recognized acupuncture as a therapy that may be performed by someone without a medical degree. Ontario is also considering approval for acupuncture.

Among the groups moving most quickly toward approval are naturopaths, who take training similar to an MD but aren't permitted to do surgery. They rely on a broad range of treatments, from changes in diet to Chinese herbal medicines and homeopathic remedies and massage with the aim of improving the body's ability to heal itself.

Practitioners say they take more time with patients than medical doctors ever do and try to get at the underlying causes for their symptoms.

Students are required to have three years of premedical studies before entering the four-year program at the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine. However, because licencing is a provincial matter, each province is in a different stage. In addition to Ontario, naturopaths are applying for recognition in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta.

But in Quebec it's a different story. "They are not regulated and in Quebec there are many people who identify themselves as naturopaths but don't meet our standards," Ms. Adams-White said. Quebec's College of Physicians and Surgeons has recently taken action against some naturopaths.

"I find Canada still a bit backwards about alternative medicine," said Jan deVries, an advocate for alternative treatments. "I have talked to many Canadian officials over the years and I find it very difficult to get the message across.

"In Europe there is more recognition because of pressure from the public. In Holland, a very skeptical minister of health said 'It's not me but the people who want it.' It helped a research team at the University of Utrecht who have been working to prove homeopathic medicine works."

In Germany and Switzerland, naturopaths and homeopaths have regulatory boards and independent groups that act as advisory committees. There has been movement toward recognition in France, Britain and Scandinavia as well, he said.

"But Canada has been very slow," Mr. deVries said. "Although I do find a very steady growth of public interest. Even in small towns, alternative-health shows that once were the realm of the curious few now draw thousands and thousands of people."

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

May 24, 2008 Saturday

**The doc to see if you're itching to conceive - or just plain itching**

**BYLINE:** AMY VERNER, averner@globeandmail.com

**SECTION:** GLOBE TORONTO; COOL WATCH: FRANCIS ROCK: THE POINT MAN; Pg. M4

**LENGTH:** 688 words

The waiting area of Francis Rock's Yorkville practice smells unmistakably like lavender. Lavender, as many aromatherapy aficionados know, helps to promote relaxation. And feeling relaxed is one of the objectives at Akuklinik, his integrated health centre that specializes in treating infertility and eliminating allergies and sensitivities.

Nestled at the end of a walkway off verdant Hazelton Avenue, the clinic is a wellness hideaway where **acupuncture** and **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine** offer an alternative to prescription drugs and turnstile consultations.

Since it opened just over a year ago, Akuklinik (*klinik* is the Swedish spelling) has attracted a largely female patient base consisting of those trying to improve their chances of conceiving naturally and others who wish to complement artificial reproductive techniques with acupuncture.

But Dr. Rock, who is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, is also gaining a reputation among Torontonians who have discovered that he is the only acknowledged practitioner in Canada to offer Advanced Allergy Therapeutics, an emerging non-invasive treatment that reduces negative reactions to otherwise benign substances.

"If someone can't breathe when they walk into a room with a cat, that's not really a normal situation," he says.

"It's an immune-system error," he explains of the rashes that people can develop to substances such as latex or silver. Through a gradual process of manual pressure and exposure to small amounts of the allergen, the body will no longer respond adversely. He used it successfully to treat his own hay fever.

Dr. Rock has attracted some holistically inclined celebs, who pass through town eager for natural remedies more common on the West Coast (doctor-patient confidentiality prevents names from being printed).

He is the first to admit that concocting herbal tinctures is a far cry from his former days of burning the midnight oil as an investment banker in London.

"It was a drastic step, but I thought drastic steps were necessary," says the Tokyo-born Brit, whose trim physique and boyish features belie his 44 years.

In the early nineties, he "suddenly became quite ill," and a doctor of Chinese medicine was the only person who "turned me around, very quickly." Once recovered, he adopted a non-traditional health-care regimen. Determined to shake up his lifestyle, he became a 32-year-old student at Vancouver's International College of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Years of clinical work in British Columbia, China, Britain and Germany eventually led to the decision to establish a practice in Toronto, a city he describes as "similar to London but without all the bad things."

Dr. Rock counts more than a dozen babies born in Akuklinik's brief lifespan and more are on the way. "It's pretty rewarding," he says. "People go through an incredibly tough time emotionally when they desperately want to have children."

At the bare minimum, he is able to improve symptoms associated with infertility for women and men (from irregular periods to lower sperm counts). And the fact that local IVF clinics have referred patients to Dr. Rock for additional support is proof positive that his work is not dismissed by conventional doctors.

Akuklinik is still undiscovered enough that people won't encounter waiting lists, but this is likely to change as AAT gains traction as an effective allergy therapy. Dr. Rock says there's nothing stopping him from setting up additional locations.

Meanwhile, he notes that he has never felt healthier. "I have to be," he says. "[I] can't be doing this kind of work if I'm not in fairly good shape medically and physically."

He makes time for yoga, boxing, tennis and working out at the nearby Yorkville Club.

Fatherhood has eluded Dr. Rock thus far, though it is not out of the question. One gets the sense that he has spent the past few years devoted to his career.

But, as dedicated as he is, Dr. Rock makes no miracle promises. "I'm not God or anything," he says from one of his tranquil treatment rooms, complete with shoji screen and soft lighting. "I'm just helping people help themselves."

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The Globe and Mail (Canada)

February 20, 2001 Tuesday

**New hopes for an old practice;**

**The ancient form of Chinese exercise and meditation;**

**known as qigong is gaining wider acceptance as a tool;**

**to promote relaxation and control chronic pain**

**BYLINE:** EGLE PROCUTA

**SECTION:** HEALTH; Pg. R6

**LENGTH:** 1789 words

By day, Douglas Ying runs an **acupuncture** clinic in Vancouver where he's had resounding success healing people with chronic pain. By night, around the stroke of 12, he sets time aside to practise ancient Chinese exercises that help him maintain his own well-being.

In a very quiet room, with a little light, he relaxes both body and mind by focusing on his breathing. After about 10 minutes, he begins to feel the chi - the invisible vital energy that, according to **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine,** flows through organs and along internal pathways, or meridians, in the body.

It starts off just below the navel, in the lower *tan tien*, an area that is believed to be the central storage place for chi in the body.

"Chi is warm and it pushes in the spine," Mr. Ying explains. "It goes up along the spine to the head, then down inside through the chest and abdomen." One circle takes just a few seconds to complete. But in that brief time, the chi is playing a crucial role in preventing the onset of illness, he says.

The centuries-old system of using breathing, meditation and gentle movements to release internal energy is called qigong (also referred to as chi kung).

But it is more than just exercises that people can do on their own to maintain good health. Qigong is also used as a form of medical treatment. Skilled practitioners, such as Mr. Ying, say they can use their own highly balanced chi to correct the internal energy flow of people suffering from illness or injury.

"Qigong for me is really interesting because you can treat some serious diseases, and it costs almost nothing," says the 50-year-old who used to be the vice-secretary of a qigong association in China representing more than 30,000 practitioners.

Like acupuncture, another means of releasing blocked energy, qigong is one part of traditional Chinese medicine, a system of health care that has a growing number of followers in Canada and is winning increasing mainstream legitimacy. British Columbia recently decided to recognize the practice of Chinese medicine as a licenced health profession. And other provinces might eventually move in the same direction.

Mr. Ying gets many referrals, from B.C.'s Workers Compensation Board, of people with workplace injuries that Western medicine hasn't been able to heal.

Stewart North, a driver of logging trucks from Vancouver Island, suffered a herniated disc in October, 1999. "It was the most excruciating pain I've ever experienced," he remembers. Surgeons told him the only option was to remove the disc, an operation that would have left the 53-year-old unable to return to work.

As a last resort, he turned to Mr.Ying and after 11 visits, Mr. North is back on the job, working 12 hours a day, "with not a tinge of pain."

His treatments were made up of acupuncture and qigong sessions during which Mr. Ying would gather his own chi in his palms and then direct it to Mr. North's body. The effect is like that of a strong magnet exerting its force over a weaker one, qigong practitioners explain.

For skeptics, it might sound like nothing more than pseudo-science. Because chi is invisible, it's difficult to prove exactly what it does in the body, according to Randy Wong, registrar at the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia, the province's regulatory body.

"Chi can be seen as something very mysterious," he says, "and some people don't believe it exists."

But some Western health-care providers are finding scientific explanations for the beneficial effects of qigong. Indeed, even if the practice just helps people relax, it would lead to positive effects on the body. After all, prolonged stress leaves a person vulnerable to a host of ailments including headaches, sleeplessness and heart disease.

In the book *Alternative Medicine, The Definitive Guide*, California osteopathic doctor Roger Jahnke notes that various studies have suggested that qigong initiates the "relaxation response." This decreases heart rate and blood pressure. It also dilates blood vessels, allowing for greater oxygen circulation in the body.

There are thousands of ways to practise qigong, explains Warren Fisher, who has run a Chinese medicine clinic in Nelson, B.C., for the past 10 years. It can be done sitting, standing still, lying down or through a series of movements.

It's appropriate, Mr. Fisher adds, that the Chinese character for chi is made up of three lines that look like layers of clouds. This shows how qigong can vary, just as clouds are constantly shifting.

Although some people spend years perfecting their technique, qigong doesn't have to be complicated, according to Henry Lu, founder of the International College of Traditional Medicine in Vancouver.

One way of releasing chi is simply by lying down on your back, with your head slightly higher than your shoulders, and breathing in a controlled rhythm: inhale, stop, inhale, exhale.

"The essential thing is to bring your mind to a focus and to concentrate on one thing, such as the breathing, so that eventually you think about nothing," Mr. Lu explains.

The myriad preoccupations of modern life can greatly imbalance a person's chi and lead to poor health, he says. "In our daily lives, we have too many things in our minds and this can introduce many harmful side effects in the body. Our emotions are responsible in many ways for our illnesses."

With this kind of across-the-board appeal, it's not surprising that qigong is becoming increasingly popular in Canada, with classes being offered at community centres and at private tai chi schools.

Many Canadians are already familiar with tai chi, the exercise system of flowing postures that people often do outdoors in groups. Tai chi, which has its roots in martial arts, is also said to release the flow of chi in the body.

But qigong is easier to learn because it has fewer movements and more repetition, says Sheila Furness, a teacher at Toronto's Tai Chi and Meditation Centre.

In a lowly lit room that looks like a dance studio, she puts eight qigong students through an hour-long workout. There's not a lot of talking during the class. "It's a matter of internal focus," Ms. Furness says. "We do a lot of visualization."

A key principle of traditional Chinese medicine is balance between the body and the environment and much of the imagery used in qigong is inspired by nature.

"Imagine you're a tree with roots running deep into the earth," Ms. Furness tells the students during a meditation posture done standing up. "Get rid of your body's stagnant energy through your feet and to the roots. Then, imagine you're dragging pure energy back into your body."

Students rub their hands vigorously and bring them to various parts of their bodies, an act that is said to impart chi to the organs. Then they work through a series of gentle, moving postures, called the Five Element Palm exercises, designed to release chi in the liver, heart, spleen, lungs and kidneys.

It may sound easy. "But there's actually a lot more to it than it looks," says Ken Poole, 63, a fire-prevention officer at the University of Toronto. "It looks very relaxed and very flowing. But it takes a while to get the movements down."

Even though it can take years before people experience the physical sensation of chi flowing through their bodies, qigong advocates say health benefits are immediate simply because of the body's relaxation response triggered by this meditative activity.

Since the mind-body connection is an essential pillar of Chinese medicine, the state of a person's spirituality cannot be completely separated from the quest for good physical health. And some people use qigong as a means of spiritual transformation and enlightenment.

In China, this has led as far as political unrest. Falun gong, a spiritual movement based on qigong, has millions of followers so devoted that Chinese authorities perceive it as a huge threat and have outlawed it. There have been brutal crackdowns, imprisonment of falun gong members and protests, ending in violence.

Aside from falun gong, there have been other controversies in China associated with qigong. Two years ago, a man who promised cures through his powers of manipulating chi was sent to jail by a Chinese court after being accused of giving unauthorized medical treatment and causing the death of 146 patients.

The possibility of qigong being abused by charlatans is one reason why Canadian advocates of Chinese medicine say it's essential to have the practice regulated, especially since it appears to be growing at a steady pace here.

Yun Yee, a Toronto radiologist, started going to a qigong class last month. But she first witnessed its healing powers 20 years ago on her father. At the time, he had a slew of medical problems such as ulcers and chronic lower back pain.

"Then he started to do qigong," Dr. Yee remembers. "His cheeks became all rosy and he stopped complaining about his pain."

Since then, she's been interested in qigong but never found enough time to learn it. Now, at 34, she says, "I'm at a time in my life when I want to focus on preventive medicine."

Dr. Yee admits some doctors she works with are skeptical about qigong.

"It's not something that's taught in medical school here. It's a completely different medium from Western medicine," she says. "My feeling is they're complementary."

**Qigong exercise**

Most qigong practices can be performed anywhere at anytime, in any type of clothing. According to traditional Chinese medicine, these exercises use the body's own energy, or "chi", to heal and maintain vital organs and boost metabolism.

**How to start:**

**To activate your body's chi, practitioners believe you should rub your hands together to create heat.**

Once warmed, place the hands over a specific organ of the body. Move the hands in a circular motion, continuing to create heat, while breathing deeply and relaxing. At the same time, visualize the chi moving out from the hands and penetrating into the organ.

**The kidneys:**

Move your palms around to your lower back. Chi is said to help the kidneys produce energy, eliminated waste products more efficiently and activate healing throughout the body.

**The liver, spleen and pancreas:**

Apply your hands to the lower edges of the rib cage, where these organs are located. Chi energy is believed to help the spleen produce white blood cells, aid the pancreas with digestion and assist the liver in removing toxins from the body.

**The heart:**

Place your hand on your breastbone, sending chi energy to the heart to help it circulate the blood. Practitioners believe the heart is the resting place of the emotional and spiritual self, so chi helps to nurture these elements as well.

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