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Alternative medicine choices gaining popularity

The increasingly diverse ethnic composition of Canadian society has fostered a profound change in the way we practice health care. A plethora of home remedies, medicines and modalities have emerged from the diverse cultures of many people that have made Canada their home. Despite compelling anecdotal evidence supporting efficacy, a large number of these alternative or complementary health care practices have yet to be submitted for rigorous scientific testing. Consequently, alternative medicine has met with staunch and stringent resistance from governmental agencies and the medical profession. Many experts have dismissed novel alternative therapeutic strategies as either quackery or blatant fraud. Meanwhile, the alternative health industry has to assume the responsibility necessary to seek credibility.

For the novice, the plunge into "alternative" or "complementary" medicine is indeed a poten-

tially bewildering experience simply because of the number of choices available.


A few of the therapies which have emerged to challenge conventional strategies are vitamin therapy, homeopathy and herbology. Vitamins are identified as necessary growth factors which are essential for human growth, maintenance and health. Deficiencies of vitamins can lead to the onset of certain diseases. Some medical experts will argue that your diet will provide you with all the vitamins necessary for good health, but a large number of clinical studies and scientific investigations definitely suggest that vitamins play a potentially more important role in the prevention of human disease.

Homeopathy is a widely accepted modality in Europe and Asia. In fact, close to 50 per cent of European medical practitioners are trained in Homeopathy. It is frequently used alongside conventional drug therapy. Homeopathy

employs infinitesimally dilute concentrations of therapeutic agents to "normalize" diseased organs without toxic side effects. Herbs, like many drugs, are natural products. In contrast to homeopathy, herbs work more like conventional drugs. The only real difference is that conventional drugs are usually pure chemicals, whereas, herbs are mixtures of chemicals. Unlike conventional drugs, herbs cannot be patented and perhaps this is the reason why pharmaceutical companies have not been interested in developing herbal remedies. However, the use of herbs as medicinal agents is gaining popularity. In fact, the Canadian government recently approved the herb Feverfew for headaches. Hopefully, this interest will attract scientific investigations which will further facilitate the evaluation of herbs as medicinal agents.

This article is courtesy of Christian Sood of Homelife Remedies, 78 Main St. N., Markham. For more information call him at 471-9902.

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