

# HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

## Alternative medicine making greater impact in health care

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 potentially bewildering experience simply because of the number of choices available which quickly exceed our imaginations. With such a large number of "cure-alls" on the market, the consumer ought to be made aware.

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 neces-

sary 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. Homeopathy employs infinitesimally dilute concentrations of therapeutic agents to "normalize" diseased organs without toxic side effects. As with most conventional drugs, the mechanisms of action are still poorly understood but large populations of people, both patients and practitioners, have accepted homeopathy as a non-toxic complementary therapeutic medicine.

Furthermore, current clinical trials in Europe are providing ongoing evidence for efficacy and providing a scientific basis for acceptance.

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. Herbs have their own unique components which make it difficult to determine which properties are responsible for the beneficial therapeutic effects. 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. Hopefully, this interest will attract scientific investigations which will further facilitate the evaluation of herbs as medicinal agents.

As you can appreciate, the topic of alternative medicine can consume many volumes of valuable information. Unfortunately, many of the remedies, medicines and modalities that are available to us have not enjoyed the same popularity as conventional medical and drug strategies. One day, with the increasing knowledge being generated through global research efforts of scientific communities, alternative medical practices and medicines will assume their rightful position alongside conventional therapeutic strategies to aid in the prevention and management of human disease.

Life as we know it always finds a way of transcending barriers no matter how ominous.

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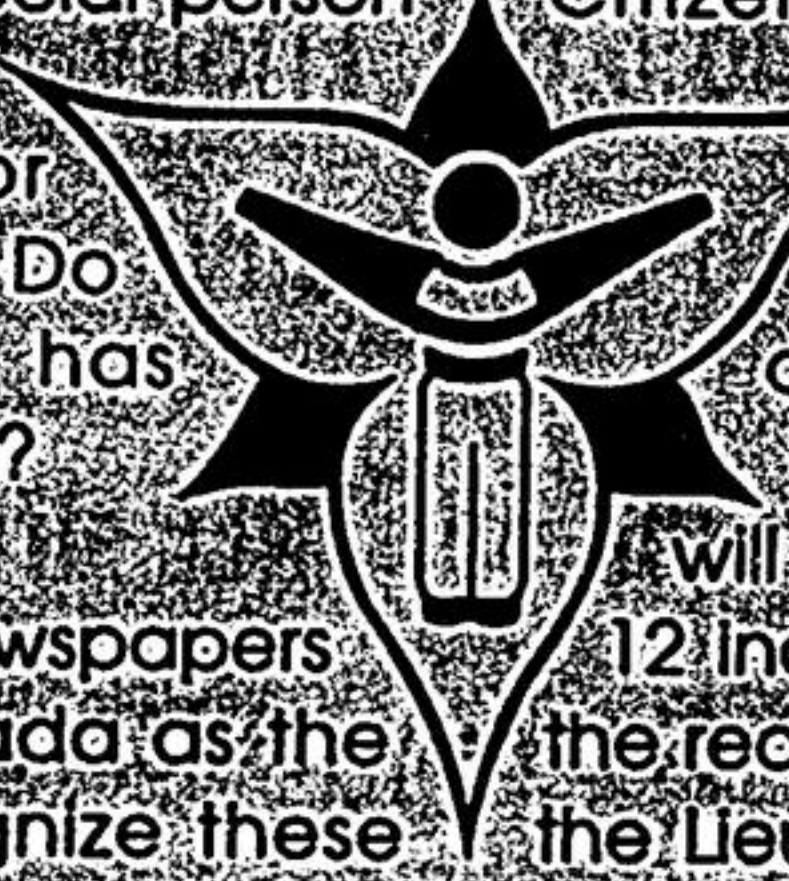


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The Ontario Community Newspapers Association, with Bell Canada as the patron, is looking to recognize these "good kids" - the young people of our province who show a commitment to making life better for others.

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