



## When East meets West

### Description

# The case for integrating Western and Chinese Medicine

By **Craig Cormack** B.A. R.M.T

I remember discussing the differences between Western and Chinese medicine with my teacher Dr. Mario Wexu, who taught me acupressure and Tuina (Chinese Massotherapy) over 20 years ago. Mario's father, Dr. Oscar Wexu, brought Chinese Acupuncture to Quebec in the late 1950s. The Wexu family were the famed founders of Acupuncture in North America. This article will contrast the two approaches of medicine and then discuss how they could be combined.

Mario said that Western medicine is wartime medicine while Chinese medicine is peacetime medicine. He went on to explain that Western medicine was born on the battlefield during both World Wars. For example, opiates were invented to deal with pain, and plasma and penicillin were miracle medicines that saved many soldier's lives during the Second World War. Triage was performed when medics treated and stabilized the wounded enabling them to be transported to MASH (Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals). Triage was done to determine the soldiers most likely to survive leaving the fatally wounded to the care of the priest for last rights. The triage system is the foundation of emergency medicine today.

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## Western Medicine is made for Emergencies

Western medicine is best applied to dealing with emergencies by fixing problems after they happen. It zeros in on symptoms with medications. This medicine model is not holistic in that it treats the body as individual separate systems. This is why we have doctors who specialize in different areas such as cardiology, oncology, pathology, etc. The body is therefore broken up into smaller and smaller areas with doctors specializing in particular areas.

## Chinese medicine is peacetime medicine



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Mario explained that Chinese medicine is peacetime medicine in that it is based upon prevention. Chinese medicine is also classified as a holistic medicine in that practitioners view the patient as a whole functioning system, not the sum of the parts. For example, practitioners of Chinese Medicine work with their patients when they are healthy to prevent illness. They correct imbalances of blood and energy circulation before illness can settle in. They work to balance not only the body but take into account a person's temperament, their state of mind and spirit.

Chinese medicine is not really effective in treating emergencies, but can be very helpful in helping patients recover quicker. Chinese medicine includes many branches including, acupuncture, acupressure, Qi Gong, Tai Chi, moxibustion, bone setting, herbs, and dietetics. These different branches can be combined to help people stay healthy or recover if they become unwell. There are hospitals in China where Western and Chinese Medicine doctors work side by side. They use the best of both worlds. Imagine a system where the diagnostics and treatments of trauma could be combined with the healing power of Chinese medicine. This would be a formidable system indeed. And this system would be much more affordable than our current system.

Changes are starting to happen. In the last 20 years, there was a noticeable opening in the Western medical community to Chinese medicine and other integrative approaches.

## **The case for integrating Western and Chinese Medicine**

Combining Western and Chinese medicine could be the answer to our struggling health system. With the increasing cost of health care, our government should consider pushing a more preventative approach on the public. This would be most effective by starting in elementary schools. Children could be taught not only how their bodies work scientifically but also how to take care of themselves from a holistic perspective including diet, exercise, meditation, herbs, etc. If more people were taught how to be healthy, healthcare costs could be cut drastically.

Changes are starting to happen. In the last 20 years, I have noticed an opening in the Western medical community to Chinese medicine and other integrative approaches. I believe this is due to published research indicating these approaches work. Also, patients are sharing their positive experiences of Chinese medicine with their family doctors. Furthermore, doctors are starting to appreciate the help they are getting because of their patients being told about the importance of healthy lifestyle practices, something that they (their doctors) don't always have time to reinforce with them.

I have always strived to help my clients reach their health goals and many times I have done this in tandem with their doctors. In one case I helped a person to reduce her weight and blood pressure and heal scarring on her heart – all of this much to the surprise of her physicians – through acupuncture (performed by Dr. Mario Wexu), diet, supplements, exercise, breathing exercises and massotherapy. I noticed that her doctors – while sceptical in the beginning when they first met me – were quite impressed with her results. To me this was not a miracle. It was simply the result of hard work done by my client who benefited from the guidance of all the practitioners involved on her journey.

Recently my practice has evolved to working with the elderly. I teach exercise classes to help seniors maintain their balance, cardio and strength. I also practice massage therapy on my elderly patients with the goals helping to improve blood and energy circulation, resulting in the reduction of pain and inflammation.

As an integrative health practitioner, I believe it is my job to help people understand how Chinese medicine works. It is also my job to make a connection with doctors to help them better understand the approach. The system is heading toward integration because the current system is not sustainable. This is great news for the general public.



In my opinion, all practitioners have a responsibility in making this transition happen. An integrative system will be efficient, effective and more humane. I hope to see it in my lifetime.

Other articles by Craig Cormack on WestmountMag.ca:

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### Category

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3. Dr. Mario Wexu
4. Dr. Oscar Wexu
5. integration
6. western medicine

### Date Created

October 2016