Complementing mainstream medicine

As unconventional therapies that fall under the umbrella term "complementary medicine" continue to gain in popularity, their use can no longer be ignored by the mainstream medical community. Experts in the field — a majority of them M.D.s and Ph.D.s — gathered last month to participate in the first major conference on complementary therapies in medicine in which presentations were subject to peer review. Co-chaired by C. Everett Koop, former surgeon general of the United States, the three-day conference (*The World Congress of Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, or WorldMed '96) took place in May in Washington, DC. *Nature Medicine* spoke with several of the speakers in advance of the conference. Between six hundred and one thousand mainstream physicians, complementary medicine practitioners and hospital and managed-care professionals were expected to attend the conference, sponsored by Churchill Livingstone,

publisher of the popular medical textbook *Gray's Anatomy*.

Acupuncture, chiropractic, Chinese traditional medicine, homeopathy, botanical medicine, nutritional medicine and Ayurveda (an ancient Indian approach to healing) were on the agenda,

as well as specific complementary therapies that may be useful in treating AIDS and cancer. The comprehensive conference also took on the challenging issue of integrating mainstream and complementary medicine, the potential economic impact of complementary therapies and the need for regulation of products and claims made about their efficacy.

One-third of people in the United States are now seeking complementary therapies, compared to 50 percent in Europe and 80 percent of the world's population as a whole, according to Marc Micozzi, executive director of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia and co-chairman of the conference. The pervasiveness of complementary therapies is an important public health issue, said Micozzi, adding that it demands that the western medical profession be actively involved. Traditionally, mainstream medicine has not been open to

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Washington State, Bastyr University lead natural medicine charge

The growing number of complementary medicine practitioners is leading to the inevitable questions of regulatory and educational requirements. Current requirements vary widely from state to state, something that one naturopathic physician says is "the real problem right now" in gaining recognition of the validity of his discipline. For example, in some states, sending in a few dollars and attending a weekend retreat is sufficient to obtain the title "Doctor of Naturopathy," or "N.D." However, a few other states have taken major strides towards regulating the growing practice. Of these, the most notable state is Washington, which not only legally requires insurance companies to pay for such alternative therapies as acupuncture and massage (as of January 1 this year), but also heavily regulates who can practice complementary medicine and the type of education they must have. Interestingly, Washington boasts within its borders Bastyr University, the first regionally accredited naturopathic medical school, located in Seattle.

Opened in 1978 as the John Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, the school was founded to "train naturopathic physicians with a scientific approach," according to Joseph Pizzorno, President and co-founder of Bastyr University. The University offers several programs, among them a four-year N.D. degree. Pizzorno says that, although the school encountered difficulties early with the medical establishment of Washington (including the Washington State Medical Association, WSMA), the last five years have seen a "fairly cordial" relationship develop.

(A spokesperson for the WSMA declined comment, but did say members would be voting soon on a general statement on complementary medicine.) "The reason we've made progress is because of the credibility of the education, research, and clinical service Bastyr provides," says Pizzorno. "I think they've realized that we're not wild-eyed radicals, but responsible members of the community who think differently about the best [medical] approach to take."

Bastyr University has also been the recipient of several large research grants, most notably US\$840,000 from the National Institutes of Health's Office of Alternative Medicine to compile information on alternative therapies used by AIDS patients.

This January, the King County Council (which governs the greater Seattle area), also voted to establish a government-subsidized natural medicine clinic, in order to make alternative treatments available to those unable to afford them. Bastyr University will likely be heavily involved.

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Quiang Cao, an acupuncturist and faculty member at Bastyr University, applies his art to a patient.

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