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Acupuncturist opens clinic in her Oak Ridge home

Traditional Chinese practice aimed at 'restoring balance'

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OAK RIDGE

Dr. Fang Mu in China is Mrs. Fang Mu in the United States.

Mu's medical degree in acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine allowed her to treat patients in a hospital near Hong Kong using both Chinese and western medicine.

But since she moved to the States, she is allowed to operate only an acupuncture and herbal-medicine clinic out of her home in Oak Ridge.

She's licensed not by the state Medical Board, but with the North Carolina Acupuncture Licensing Board.

"Sometimes it's a little bit uncomfortable for me, but I think I understand," she said.

Alternative medicine such as acupuncture is gaining ground in the United States. Some large insurance companies now offer co-payments for alternative treatment. Almost two-thirds of traditional U.S. medical schools now teach alternative therapies, including chiropractic, acupuncture, herbal remedies and mind-body medicine.

Acupuncture is the insertion of fine needles into the body's surface to improve its energy flow, or Chi. The basic premise is that there are patterns of energy flow through the body that can be disrupted by disease.

Mu compares the body at this point to a TV with bad reception. Acupuncture restores the balance, she said.

"The energy is blocked, and the needles help restore the balance," she said.

But there are other theories on how it works.

Some studies suggest it may relieve pain by triggering the release of pain-relieving chemicals in the central nervous system.

The National Institutes of Health reported in 1997 that there is clear evidence that acupuncture is an effective treatment for postoperative pain, and for nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy and probably for pregnancy-related nausea.

It said that acupuncture may be a useful treatment for other medical conditions including addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps and asthma.

But studies showing acupuncture's effectiveness are often too small or have too few controls, the NIH

said.

Mu, now 38, has sworn by the practice since she was 12.

That's when her mother suffered a back injury and was paralyzed from the waist down, she said.

Mu's father had been working in a hospital for several years, where he had learned how to practice acupuncture. He treated his wife daily with acupuncture, curing her in about two months, Mu said.

Mu asked her father to tutor her in the practice soon after.

She then went on to study at the Chinese medical college in Jiangxi.

After school, Mu worked in a 1,600-bed Chinese medicine hospital for eight years. She married her husband, Bin Mu, while working there.

He is a DNA researcher, practicing only western medicine. "We fought a lot about it at first," she said.

He wanted to treat their daughter with prescription medicine; she preferred herbal remedies.

Mu tells of a time that she effectively used a tea to treat her daughter's flu symptoms. "After that, he changed," she said.

Her husband got a job in Oklahoma in 1993, and she and their then 3-year-old daughter, Sherry, followed him to the United States a year later.

Mu's husband recently took a job at Trans Tech Pharma in High Point, and the family moved to Oak Ridge this month.

Mu said that when she first arrived in the United States, she missed China, her family and her language.

But the clinic that she opened in Oklahoma brought her in touch with people. She learned English through her clients, befriending many.

The walls of a room near the entrance to her new home are covered with posters displaying acupuncture points, marking the meridians along which she says the body's energy flows.

But these are largely for decoration. Mu has memorized more than 400 acupuncture points.

In another room, a cupboard stretches the length of one wall.

Inside are yellow tins of herbal remedies, labeled in Chinese.

Mu said she continues to use Chinese with her daughters, Sherry and Suzanne, now 12 and 4.

And as she works with patients, she said, her youngest daughter often stops by to ask in Chinese if she can help.

Mu said she is just starting to get a new list of patients, but that she feels that she was called to Oak Ridge.

She said she saw in a dream that she would move.

"I've got to have some reason," she said. "I don't know what yet."

This story can be found at : <http://www.journalnow.com/wsj/news/MGB3CVKGPQC.html>