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New-age prescriptions: Yoga, hypnosis, acupuncture, more

By Cecilia Oleck
Mcclatchy News Service

DETROIT -- Belinda Lowe is the kind of patient the medical profession is scrambling to catch up to.

The 43-year-old from Westland, Mich., sees her doctor regularly, exercises and eats well and wants her health care providers to be as interested in caring for her mind, body and spirit as she is. And she wants her health care to be as natural as possible.

So when Lowe decided to have surgery last fall to get her tubes tied, she was surprised and pleased when the obstetrician/gynecologist suggested that she undergo **hypnosis** before surgery rather than receive anesthesia to numb her body and prevent pain.

The experience, says Lowe, was like being on a tropical vacation, albeit in a doctor's office.

"It was like lying on the beach, it was so serene," says Lowe, a project manager for a telecommunications company.

Physicians like Richard Herman, the Botsford General Hospital obstetrician/gynecologist who performed Lowe's **hypnosis** and surgery, are part of a new wave in the movement of therapies from the fringes of health care into mainstream medical circles. Traditional health care providers are responding to patients like Lowe by offering **hypnosis**, acupuncture, massage, vitamins, herbal supplements, meditation, yoga and guided imagery in addition to conventional medical care.

Much of what is considered alternative or complementary medicine is aimed at preventing illness, allowing the body to heal itself naturally and caring for a person's physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs. It also encourages people to learn about their health and the options for maintaining or improving it. For Herman, learning **hypnosis** and incorporating it into his medical practice makes sense for him and his patients.

"People are looking for a better way," says Herman, adding that since last summer, about 20 patients have opted for **hypnosis** in place of anesthesia. "If there's a way we're treating people, there's a way to do it better."

Lowe says she chose **hypnosis** because "I would rather see what I could do holistically before pumping myself with medicines."

Even the name "alternative" -- used to describe therapies outside the scope of traditional medicine -- can be misleading now, says Mayo Clinic physician Brent Bauer. As more health care providers offer such services, it makes sense to refer to the therapies as complementary or integrative.

"This whole realm ... is part of our culture now. It's a part of how we take care of ourselves," says Bauer, who is the director of the Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program at the Rochester, Minn., health system and editor of "The Mayo Clinic Guide to Alternative Medicine " (Time Inc. Home Entertainment, \$24.95), a new book that attempts to debunk medical myths and

assess the effectiveness of common alternative treatments. "I suspect in a few more years we'll just drop all the labels and we'll just talk about good medicine."

Fueled by aging baby boomers looking to exert more control over their health care, the alternative health industry has grown into an estimated \$47 billion annual business, prompting more traditional health care providers to look at some of the therapies and incorporate them into their practices.

Many hospitals offer such services.

As more research is done to validate therapies and as patients request complementary treatments, doctors are becoming more willing to recommend that their patients try the therapies, many as a way of relieving chronic pain, says Maria Wilson, a former physical therapist who manages her husband's medical office.

Wilson's husband is physician Stephen Wilson, whose St. Clair Shores, Mich., practice draws patients seeking pain relief and management.

He became certified as a medical acupuncturist and began offering other complementary treatments in his practice when he noticed that many patients were not satisfied with surgery because it didn't relieve their pain. They would head to Canada or other places to receive alternative treatments.

He then opened his own practice specializing in pain management and relief using complementary and conventional medicine.

"Now I have a whole host of other things that I can choose from to treat them, and they know it's from a reputable source," says Wilson.

That those who practice conventional medicine are opening up to non-traditional practices is a good thing for patients, who will be more in control of their own health care, says Bauer.

"You've got to stop smoking, be active, eat nutritiously," he says. "That's the underpinning. None of this stuff is a magic bullet. The key to all this is having a nice foundation."

Unconventional Medicine

Alternative medicine: Treatments used instead of traditional medicine.

Complementary or integrative medicine: Nontraditional therapies used with conventional treatment.

Holistic care: Medical care that focuses on treating the whole person, addressing social, physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Naturopathy: Form of medicine based on the belief that the body has a natural ability to heal in a healthy environment. It relies on natural remedies such as sunlight, air, water and supplements, as well as massage and acupuncture.

Homeopathy: Form of complementary or alternative medicine that believes the body can heal itself and tries to stimulate self-healing with small, sometimes highly diluted plant, animal and mineral substances.

Source: The Mayo Clinic Guide to Alternative Medicine

Find a Complementary-Care Practitioner

- Talk with your primary-care physician about the therapy you are interested in. Ask for a recommendation.
- Make a list of practitioners with information about their credentials, licenses and certifications.
- Find out what the treatment will cost and if it is covered by health insurance.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask at your first visit with the practitioner. Do the benefits of the treatment outweigh the risks?
- Be prepared to share your health history with the practitioner, including any prescription medications, vitamins and supplements you take.
- Decide after your first visit if you want to stick with the practitioner and go ahead with the treatment.

Source: National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine,
Mayo Clinic Guide to Alternative Medicine

[<http://www.northjersey.com/page.php?qstr=eXJpcnk3ZjczN2Y3dnFIZUVFeXk1NDImZmdiZWw3Zjd2cWVIRUV5eTcwNzY3NTQmeXJpcnk3ZjcxN2Y3dnFIZUVFeXk1>]