



Ivy League medical school seeks help in Md. for alternative medicine

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Laurel-based Tai Sophia will partner with Penn to train students in botanical healing, other techniques

After presenting the benefits of acupuncture, botanical healing and other alternative medical procedures to a group of traditional physicians, Robert Duggan said he received a response that perfectly represents the contradictory relationship many Western doctors have with complimentary medicine.

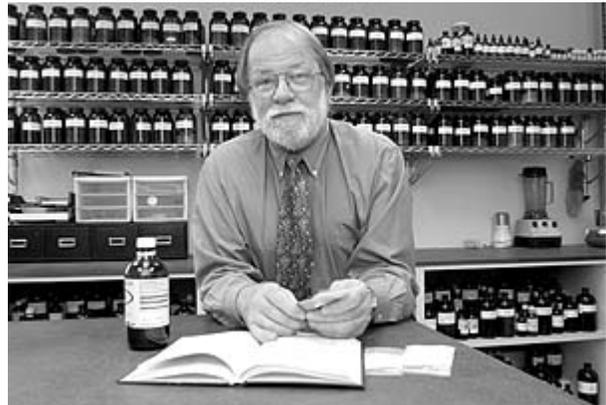
A doctor claimed he couldn't afford to learn about complimentary medicine. Knowing about it, the doctor said, would mean he would have to understand it, and that would make him liable.

Later, when the talk was over and the two were chatting in the parking lot, that same skeptical doctor told Duggan he had given a relative an herbal remedy. He wanted to know if it would help.

For Duggan, a co-founder and president of Laurel's 30-year-old [Tai Sophia Institute](#), the paradox is representative of a culture that widely embraces complimentary and alternative therapies while traditional practitioners marginalize them.

A groundbreaking study in 1997 by Harvard researcher David Eisenberg found 42 percent of Americans were using alternative medicine, spending an estimated \$27 billion per year. The same year, the National Institutes of Health Office of Alternative Medicine found 80 percent of medical students want training in nontraditional therapies.

The curiosity about alternative therapies harbored by many students studying Western medicine has prompted the [University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine](#) to partner with Tai Sophia on a master's degree program in complementary medicine.



*Robert Duggan, co-founder and president of Tai Sophia Institute, said traditional doctors continue to shun alternative medicine despite its growing popularity. For instance, a study found 80 percent of medical students want training in nontraditional therapies. **Photos by Eric Stocklin***

The degree, which Duggan described as one of the first of its kind, will come from Tai Sophia, which has graduated more than 700 active practitioners of acupuncture and other healing arts — a curriculum which, as of last year, includes botanical healing.

The master's program will be jointly developed by Tai Sofia and the faculty of University of Pennsylvania medical school and will be open to the university's medical and nursing students.

The partnership is part of a growing acceptance and expansion of teaching students on the campuses of medical schools across the country about nontraditional methods of healing.

Complimentary alternative medicine centers exist at Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, Stanford and several universities in the University of California system.

The University of Maryland School of Medicine established its inter-departmental [Center for Integrative Medicine](#) in 1991. The center conducts research on complementary medicine, integrates the therapies into patient care and educates students in all four years of medical school.

What makes the collaboration between Tai Sophia and the University of Pennsylvania unique, said Duggan, is that University of Pennsylvania officials came to Tai — for its 30-year history of teaching complimentary therapies — rather than inventing their own program.



Acupuncture will be added to the curriculum at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine through the school's partnership with Tai Sophia.

"I know of no place in the country where an independent college is part of a major university health system," Duggan said.

And so it will be Tai Sophia's job to make University of Pennsylvania medical students familiar with the alternative therapies that many believe can deal with issues conventional medicine cannot.

Some 70 percent of patients seek help for diseases that traditional doctors cannot treat, Duggan said.

"Our job is to teach them how to deal with that before it [the ailments] becomes a pathology," he said. "One of the big things is that we know to teach doctors how to listen and question."

Both are techniques that will come in handy when dealing with alternative health care methods, which address patients as whole people, not as a disease.

The catalog for the new program includes an introduction to phytotherapy, or healing through plants, an approach that involves herbs, aromatic essential oils, seaweeds and herbal and floral extracts. Students also can take a course on the different principles of the world's medical tradition, from the Chinese tradition to the African, in addition to already existing Penn courses on "basic mindfulness" and spirituality and medicine.

Duggan expects about 10 percent of the University of Pennsylvania's upcoming fall class of about 140 students will opt into the program when it starts in August.

Under the affiliation, the partnership between the two schools will establish "an optimal healing environment" program for cardiac patients at Penn's Presbyterian Medical Center in West

Philadelphia.

The program will integrate complimentary and alternative therapies to help cardiac patients deal with pain, anxiety and stress and include a mandatory class for every cardiac employee on mindfulness mediation.

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