

Child Family Health International: Introduction to Traditional Indian Medicine

Rishikesh and Dehradun, India, June 6 – July 3, 2010

Turya Nair

My interest in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) made me determined to find a summer program where I could explore such therapies in depth where they are practiced by certified, experienced practitioners. CFHI's Introduction to Traditional Indian Medicine fit this description perfectly. The program included opportunities to shadow allopathic physicians *and* CAM practitioners, giving me a well-rounded perspective into healthcare practices in India. I had the rare opportunity to learn the basics of homeopathy, Reiki, acupressure, naturopathy and Ayurveda. The program also incorporated lessons in the ancient Indian techniques of yoga and meditation, which are still in popular practice today and considered very beneficial to holistic health.

This program followed a four-week schedule, with each week providing a new setting, a new focus and new practitioners to follow; the individual organization of the weeks varies from session to session. The four weeks invariably include two weeks of home-stay in the city of Dehra Dun, a week of rural medicine in the CFHI-sponsored free clinic in Than Gaon village (largely funded by program fees), and a week in the health and religious pilgrimage town, Rishikesh.

Every day of this program was highly fulfilling. Spending a week with certified homeopath, Dr. Nanda, I now have a working knowledge of the principles and prescribing guidelines of this unusual and popular approach to healthcare. From Dr. Prem Nath, an incredible 98-year-old scholar and clinician, I learned the philosophies of Reiki, acupressure and Ayurveda. The week spent in the Than Gaon village, set at the foothills of the Himalayas, was truly special. We lived and worked with Dr. Paul, the sole doctor who sees patients at the CFHI Village Clinic. His knowledge, manner with patients, sense of humor and selfless dedication to his work continue to be an inspiration to me. It was also gratifying to see the impact of the program fees we had paid, going directly to caring for the people of Than Gaon and the neighboring villages where we conducted one-day health camps.

At the allopathic sites, I saw how Indian physicians incorporate traditional therapies into their treatments. I also have a new-found gratitude for the level of resources available to even a simply American healthcare practice, which are not available or affordable to analogous healthcare settings in India.

The complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) techniques listed above are some of the oldest, most popular, and most trusted ones practiced in India and around the world today. Furthermore, the U.S.'s National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) found that millions of Americans use yoga, Reiki, Ayurveda, homeopathy, naturopathy and meditation as part of their personal healthcare, according to the National Health Interview Survey of 2007. With these figures in mind, I know that having this exposure to these topics will help me better care for future patients who may use or inquire about these therapies. Furthermore, the harmonious integration between allopathic medicine and CAM modalities is an idea I intend to explore as a physician, regardless of the specialty into which I enter.

