Patients are lining up for a taste of Dr. Fred Hui's medicine which blends the best of Chinese and Western therapies.

By Janice Dineen
Staff Reporter

Physician Fred Hui listens carefully to his 11-year-old patient's symptoms, then checks the boy's throat, tongue, ears and the glands in his neck. He notes fever, swollen and discolored tonsils, swollen glands, a cough and a hoarse voice.

Hui gives the boy a prescription for an antibiotic, some tablets to control the fever ... and two boxes of Chinese herbs to mix with water and take three times a day to help rebuild his body's defences.

Hui's practice is an unorthodox concert of Eastern and Western medicine. He does a lot of acupuncture. He often writes prescriptions, or refers a patient to a specialist. He uses his hands to manipulate the energy around a patient's body, a process that looks something like Therapeutic Touch.

His patients express great enthusiasm for the United Nations brand of medicine he practises.

"When I first came to Dr. Hui, I was a mess," says Joe Marrin. "I didn't have a life. I had no movement in my neck and if anyone touched my back I would scream in pain. My headaches were so bad I would literally roll on the floor in pain. Now the pain is manageable. I'm a happy guy."

Marrin was in bed for four months after an automobile accident near his home north of Parry Sound, then went to a Sudbury clinic daily for two months without any change in his condition.

Because of a fear of needles, he had to be dragged to Hui's office by a friend who had found the acupuncture and herbs effective in staving off some of the elements of her own multiple sclerosis.

Marrin walked into the doctor's office the first time with no use of his left arm. By the end of his first acupuncture treatment, he could lift that arm up over his head. Marrin has rented an apartment near Hui's office so he can have treatment on weekdays, then drives six hours each way to spend weekends at home with his family.

Joan Xepappas says Hui's acupuncture saved her from having a spinal fusion. "Dr. Hui just sparkles when he relieves your pain," she says. "He really gets excited about getting you well."

Hui, 42, says he tries to treat every patient as a relative. "I think, how would I handle this case if this were my sister or my nephew?"

He believes he is the only licensed Canadian physician east of Edmonton applying an integrated approach of Chinese and Western medicine which, he says, is the accepted approach for all doctors in China today. Hui makes daily use of a huge reference book put together by Chinese medical experts in both traditions for doctors using an integrated practice.

When he was a small boy in Hong Kong, the second of seven children in his family, he was a frail, sickly, asthmatic child in and out of hospitals all the time. While his sisters and brothers fought over the comics pages, he went off by himself to read the medical news. Young Fred missed the entire school year in Grade 4 because of illness. Constant weakness and sickness were so depressing that even at age 9 he felt an understanding of how people occasionally consider suicide as an escape from disease. That was the year he decided he was going to grow up to see medicine from the other side of the fence: he would become a doctor.

Growing up in Hong Kong, he was taken both to doctors who practised Chinese medicine and doctors who practised Western medicine. After he graduated from the University of Toronto medical school and set up a practice in Toronto in 1980, he decided to blend the two.

His family practice grew so overwhelmingly through word of mouth that it is 120 per cent full and he (However please see Doctor's, E3
Doctor's success blends best of Chinese, Western medicine

has had to stop taking new family practice patients. Many of his long-time patients now see one of his colleagues for routine Western medical procedures, and see Hui only for conditions that need a combination East/West approach.

Every Wednesday and Friday afternoons, he goes out to some corner of the health care community to learn from the expertise of others. For example, he spent many afternoons observing an ear, nose and throat specialist treating patients. He has studied the way psychiatrists deal with patients. He has spent time observing herbalists, homeopaths, naturopaths and chiropractors.

"I try to learn from them all," he says. "I may go to a Chinese herbal store and find the man who has owned it for 30 years. I will question him about what things work well and what things don't work."

Hui has brought Professor Zeng Lu, 62, physician-in-chief for 35 years at Beijing Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine, to Toronto as an adviser in his practice. Zeng Lu's knowledge of Chinese medicine is encyclopedic.

"I see myself as a bridge," Hui says. "I was born Chinese and planted in Canada. I would like to be a resource for other physicians. And I would like to see young, graduating physicians develop an interest in this combination of Chinese and Western medicine."

"My dream is a centre where we could bring in visiting experts from all different cultures to treat problems that can't be solved with the usual methods," he says.

While many patients are helped by Western medicine, Hui suggests, there are some conditions that often respond better to Chinese medicine. These include acute shingles, many kinds of headaches, musculo-skeletal disorders such as tendinitis or back and neck pain, periphery nerve disorders such as weakness and numbness, abnormal menstrual periods when the usual causes have been ruled out, lack of energy or fatigue of unknown origin, lack of appetite, insomnia, and autonomic nervous system disorders such as excessive sweating, dry mouth or irregularity.

Hui doesn't adhere to any organized religion but he relates strongly to Taoist philosophy, and believes that everything and everyone experiences cycles throughout life and beyond. He learned the key to keeping his energy at peak and keeping his calm and good cheer all day during the grueling training required in medicine. He used to duck into a vacant classroom and meditate for half an hour then return to his work and studies refreshed while other students were wilting under the pace and pressure. These days he spends half of each lunch hour in meditation.

In his private life, Hui enjoys gourmet restaurants, tennis, golf, ski weekends all winter and resort weekends all summer. "I love every bit of my life," he says. "I work hard and I play hard."

He travels several times a year with his wife Rebecca and their daughters Melody, 10, and Vanessa, 6. They took a Baltic cruise last year as well as visiting Mexico and England. They plan to go to Hawaii at Christmas.

In a typical day in his office, he gives acupuncture to several patients recovering from accidents and to one recovering from chronic fatigue. Using a German technique, he injects local anesthetic at acupuncture points for a patient with trigeminal neuralgia, a condition causing tics and severe shooting pain in the face. The technique makes it possible for the man to eat and talk, which the pain prevented before he started these treatments.

Georgina, 84, of Willowdale, is suffering cramping in her toe at night. Hui tells her to put magnets in the bed with her to prevent the cramps. He gives her acupuncture for her arthritis and a Chinese syrup for her cough.

"He's my magician," Georgina declares. "I've gone to many doctors in my 84 years but never one like Dr. Hui. He does wonders."