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East meets West in his office

Powerful! That's the word Toronto's Dr. Fred Hui uses to describe the experience of practising a combination of Eastern and Western medicine.

The Hong Kong-born doctor, who graduated medicine from the University of Toronto in 1979, feels that combining Eastern and Western medicines is the best way for him to fulfill his own role as a physician.

Traditional, Western medicine is what most of us are used to. All medical doctors in North America are trained by, granted degrees from, and licensed by, bodies that believe in the traditional model and teach it.

Eastern medicine, that which is taught and practised throughout the far east, is in North America lumped under the general umbrella of alternative medicine. And many Western doctors dismiss it as quackery.

But times are changing. Most of us have used alternative medicine in one form or another when we've had a therapeutic massage for a pulled muscle, or popped an echinacea capsule to ward off a cold, or visited a chiropractor for a bad back.

Slowly, traditional medicine is making room for alternatives: In Vancouver Hospital's Tzu Chi Institute, for instance, there's currently an ambitious research project to find out which alternative treatments work and which ones do not.

Here in Toronto, Dr. Fred Hui's very busy midtown practice is a testament to the fact that the general public is willing to try anything that works. "I don't care whether the tools come from one toolbox or the other," he says, explaining why he uses methods that may be criticized by his peers. He's also careful to add that he uses alternative therapies only on conditions that are benign.

Originally a family physician, his practice has become one that deals with so-called "unsolvable problems" — which, to Hui, means that he'll try something alternative on a

patient for whom traditional medicine has not been successful.

Hui was a sick kid whom other kids called "rotten face" because of his childhood eczema; his childhood asthma made him so pale

that his mother used to say that when she needed to buy white paper she could take him along as a sample.

It was inevitable he would end up in medicine, he says, "as either a doctor, a nurse or an ambulance driver."

By Grade 6, he was reading every newspaper medical column he could get his hands on. Medical school was his goal,

but when a toothache prevented him from writing entrance exams in Hong Kong, he came to Toronto and entered medical school here.

Hui's curiosity in alternative medicine has led to some rather unorthodox methods of assessing whether something is worth further study.

If a patient comes in and tells of a treatment that worked on him, Hui will phone up the practitioner and ask if he can learn from him. "They love to have the respect of a medical doctor coming to learn from them. But if a guy says, 'No, I don't want to teach you anything,' then I don't want to learn from him anyway."

Over the years, he has studied with several different masters who have taught him everything from acupuncture to cupping, the latter a technique used to increase circulation by using a flame on a glass cup which creates a vacuum on the skin.

At a hotel in Jamaica, he asked the concierge the way to the local witch doctor. Hui's philosophy? "Who cares where it comes from as long as it works."

Unlike many docs, this one loves melatonin, and he has had success with a unique German treatment method in which he injects local anesthetic into a painful area to numb the nerves. He believes Chinese herbs help to strengthen the body so it can heal better: "Chinese herbs together work like an orchestra," he smiles.

Twice daily, for 26 years, he's taken a "tranquility nap," a 20 min-



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— Dr. Fred Hui,
about western and
eastern medicines



— Veronica Henri, SUN

LITTLE OF THIS, BIT OF THAT ... A mix of healing techniques works for Toronto's Dr. Fred Hui.

ute treatment tool — a meditation and relaxation exercise which revitalizes him. (He's also a serious ballroom dancer!) Here's a physician who's even used therapeutic touch, the so-called "laying on of the hands," which many docs say is hokey. He tried it, but without telling his patient because he didn't believe it would work. "But it made him feel better," Hui smiles. "I found that interesting."

The way Hui explains it, Western medicine with its "bypass it, kill it, or replace it" mentality looks after

the body's hardware while Eastern and alternative medicine is very good at the software stuff, that of which the body has the capacity to reverse itself. He's talking tiredness, PMS, unexplainable headaches. Your Western medicine isn't solving your stomach disorder? Try Chinese white parsnip. Lately, he's had very good success success at curing shingles — a painful virus that erupts in the skin and nerves — through alternative therapies.

"We are the body's servicemen."

says Hui of his approach to medicine. "There are many tradesmen who have tackled this machine before and they have accumulated a lot of wisdom over 2,000 years. It would be arrogant of me to think that only what I learned in the last 20 years is relevant. They must have some things that have worked in the past."

"When I realized the wealth of treasures of medicine and philosophy in places like China I felt I had a calling to transmit that knowledge between east and west."