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, grunted 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 ephedrine capsule to ward off a cold, or visited a chiropractor for a back problem.

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 don't.

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, Hui's 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 asthma, his childhood eczema; his childhood "rotten face" because of his childhood asthma.

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

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

"We are the body's servicemen..." There are many tradesmen who have tackled this machine before and they have accumulated a lot of wisdom over 2,000 years. — Dr. Fred Hui about western and eastern medicines

Dr. Fred Hui 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."