

East meets West in busy Edmonton practice

Dr. Steven Aung says his life and medical philosophies are rooted in lessons he learned as a child in Burma. The teacher was his grandfather, a sixth-generation Chinese physician.

As a 7-year-old, Aung remembers walking up almost 4000 steps every morning in the tranquil Burmese hill country to perform *Tai Chi* and listen to his grandfather's advice that he devote his life to the betterment of mankind, to learning both Eastern and Western medicine, and to being the best he could be, regardless of where he was.

Aung, 52, has tried to follow that advice. Indeed, he has carried his grandfather's torch as a physician who practises geriatrics, family medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. He runs a popular clinic in Edmonton, teaches at hospitals and with organizations around the world, and serves as medical acupuncture consultant for the NHL's Edmonton Oilers. He's also an accomplished artist, having recently exhibited his paintings and calligraphy in Edmonton. His 3 daughters and 1 son all study in different health care professions.

To accommodate a packed schedule, Aung has slept only 3 hours a night for the past 30 years. He augments this with *qi gong* meditation — he calls learning this ancient technique “the best investment in my life.”

Aung's life work started with an eclectic education that began when he started living in Burmese monasteries at age 7 — a common boyhood rite in that country. He later attended Catholic schools in Rangoon to learn English, went to medical school at the University of Rangoon and arrived in Canada in 1973. After interning in Quebec and receiving further training in other provinces, he settled in Edmonton in 1980 and began practising geriatrics with the goal of offering integrated Eastern and Western medicine. He was disturbed by the high numbers of medications his patients were taking and worked hard to develop new approaches that relied less on drugs.

Aung recalls one patient who was receiving morphine be-

cause of severe pain. He attempted acupuncture and successfully weaned the patient from the drug. Slowly, he began receiving more referrals and started to train colleagues in acupuncture. Seven years later, he established the Certificate Program in Medical Acupuncture at the University of Alberta; since 1990, it has trained about 400 physicians, dentists and physiotherapists in the technique. About 15% of Alberta dental students are now proficient in acupuncture, he says, and the technique is being used by some practitioners during oral surgery.

In his medical practice, Aung emphasizes self-responsibility for health and combines meditation techniques with counselling for illness prevention. He integrates Eastern and Western medicine, consulting with the family doctors and specialists who refer his patients.

The patients vary widely. About 30% are children, some with gastrointestinal conditions and cancer, while another 60% are adult patients, many of whom have cancer. The final 10% are athletes. He works with many prominent figure skaters and continues to treat Edmonton Oilers' players. “I love hockey,” says Aung, who attends many of the team's games.

An offshoot to his practice is a *qi gong* club that meets twice weekly to teach preliminary and advanced meditation techniques.

He says compassion is the cornerstone of his approach to medicine: “I treat everybody as family,” he says. “My patients are my teachers.”

Aung, who has several visiting professorships, travels frequently to China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. He founded the World Natural Medicine Foundation, which will hold its annual congress in Edmonton this summer. He hopes the gathering will help generate progress toward his vision for an alternative healing hospital in Edmonton. He would like to start by providing outpatient services and training more practitioners. “Your duty is to do the best you can,” he says.

No doubt his grandfather would be proud. — Heather Kent, Vancouver



Dr. Aung: 3 hours' sleep a night