

THE MEDICINE MAN

BY KAREN MACKLIN

The East Side office of Dr. Christopher Trahan looks like an ordinary doctor's office. Pictures line the walls, and magazines are stacked on stands that sit beside cushioned seats.

But the usual elevator music is replaced by soft sounds of the rainforest, and strange herbal scents remind the patient that Trahan is anything but a regular doctor.

Trahan is a licensed acupuncturist who also practices traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), as well as homeopathy. He works out of an earthy office on Fifth Avenue and East 28th Street.

"Herbs have been on this planet for many years ... interacting with humans," said Trahan. "Herbs may be viewed as encompassing a spectrum from being super foods to potent medicines."

Trahan, 41, began his involvement

with herbal medicine in 1979. Shortly afterward, he spent six months in Sri Lanka receiving training in acupuncture. He also studied TCM with a Chinese doctor from a teaching hospital in China.

He was driven into the field of herbal medicine originally by an unrelenting case of hay fever, he said, which affected him four months out of the year. Today, he said, he is almost entirely free of this allergy and owes it to the medicine of herbs.

Some weeks he sees over 40 patients — all of whom recognize the benefits of alternative medicine. They come from all over, with an assortment of ailments ranging from cold and flu symptoms to gynecological problems to backaches. Trahan said he uses a combination of his various areas of expertise to treat pa-

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tients.

"It's important that people realize," said Trahan, "there are many kinds of [medical] knowledge."

Trahan said that Western doctors are not always open to herbal medicine because of how they are conditioned while studying.

"Culturally speaking, [Western] doctors are immersed in scientific medicine for eight to 15 years by the time they finish their training," he said.

Western medicine, Trahan said, is not always the most effective treatment. He even said herbal treatments would surpass the effects of a drug like Prozac and offer less side effects.

But Trahan doesn't knock Western medicine. In fact, he has a certified physician working beside him in his office, Dr. Henry Hom. Trahan said he also uses his own "modern understanding of virus and immunology" in his practice.

According to Trahan, in diagnosing and treating a patient, the two most important areas to look at are the pulse and, strangely enough, the tongue.

"The tongue is a reflection of the entire body," he said. Someone anemic would have a pale tongue, he added, and someone stressed out would have a red-tipped tongue.

Trahan uses a wide range of powdered herbs and tinctures, from both abroad and right here in the United States, to treat patients' ailments. He said herbs acquired within the country have at least as much quality as those obtained from elsewhere.

Occasionally animal products are used in TCM, but usually only insects and never endangered plants or animals, he said.

Although Trahan will treat patients for an acute problem, like a cold sore or a backache, he much prefers to treat them "constitutionally." That means using an overall medical analysis to diagnose and treat the whole patient, not just their immediate symptoms.

TCM can be used for many illnesses, he said, including the common cold.

"In Western medicine," he said, "a cold is a cold is a cold." In TCM, he said, there are two basic variants of colds. "Wind-heat" produces fever, sore throat and dryness, and "wind-cold" gives one chills and body aches.

Trahan treated a reporter with a stuffy nose at his office recently for "wind-heat" cold symptoms by measuring and mixing together different liquids in a small brown dropper bottle. He prescribed four drops, four times a day (after looking at her tongue and asking specific medical questions).

"There's nothing antagonistic about natural healing," Trahan said. "Twenty years ago, it was a countercultural movement, but now it's become a fundamental fulcrum for people seeking out healthcare."



Severe hay fever prompted Dr. Christopher Trahan to study herbal medicine.