

The Struggle for Integration of Traditional Native American Medicine and Allopathic Medicine

By

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Introduction and Explanation of Purpose

As we are well on our way into the 21st century, there is still a strong resistance among Native American tribes, and specifically those in the Southwest, with regards to incorporating allopathic medicine into traditional ways. What is the source of this resistance and have any measures been taken to narrow such a rift? Throughout this review it will be important to introduce the issues, understand the different approaches to healing in allopathic and Traditional Indian Medicine, and to provide recommendations based on these findings to ensure that the best possible care is being provided.

Definition of Terms

It is necessary to define a few important terms before this paper progresses. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines ‘traditional medicine’ as “ [...] the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness” (1) The traditional medicine that will be specifically addressed is that of American Indian tribes and will be referred to as Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM). Furthermore, the WHO explains, “The terms ‘complimentary medicine’ or ‘alternative medicine’ are used interchangeably with traditional medicine in some countries. They refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of the country’s own tradition and are not integrated into the dominant health care system” (1). Lastly, “[...] ‘integrative medicine’ refers to efforts on the part of conventional physicians to blend biomedical and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies or the collaborative efforts between biomedical physicians and CAM practitioners to address health care needs of specific patients” (2)

Background

While this review will not go into great detail regarding the extensive historical relationship between the Native Americans and the federal government, certain events are necessary to mention in setting the current climate of the relationship. In all formal settlements with the United States government, Native Americans use pipe ceremonies, where according to their beliefs, the smoke from the pipe travels upwards to The Creator, confirming the pact made between the participants. No American Indian would go back on his word once an arrangement has been made. However, over time the United States government began to ignore the impact of this ceremony and in turn broke treaties that many American Indians considered sacred and unbreakable. The Snyder Act, enacted in 1921, was the primary source directing allocation of funds towards the needs of the Native American people. (3) The Act stated that the US government would provide “for the benefit, care, and assistance of the Indians throughout the United States [...] for the relief of distress and conservation of health” (4). The Act also addressed a variety of other issues ranging from education to employment. As a result of this Act, the Indian Health Services (IHS) was formed within the Department of Health and Human Services, stating that “The IHS is the principal federal health care provider and health advocate for the Indian people” (6). The IHS understands the traditional ways of the Native American people and works to improve the people’s health while respecting their traditions and methods of healing. As such, the IHS acts as the middleman between the Indian people and the federal government to ensure that American Indians are receiving quality healthcare. The IHS employs

American Indians whenever possible. Native Americans are familiar with the issues of their local tribes as well as national issues, which allows for better recommendations and solutions to the issue of providing quality care for American Indians.

Despite the development of the IHS, there is still considerable evidence that shows much higher morbidity among American Indians and a lack of resources and funding provided for healthcare for this population. Prompted by the need for future research, the American Indian and Alaska Native Health Research Advisory Council was created in 2006, to innumerate the health research priorities for the reservations and to formulate solutions to the issues identified in the studies conducted. In 2009, the Obama administration allocated \$500 million under the American Recovery and Investment Act thought the IHS towards health facilities construction, maintenance and improvements, health information technology, sanitation facilities construction and health equipment (8). Recently, in 2010, the Indian Health Care Improvement Act was reauthorized under President Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. "The bill addresses recruiting and retaining physicians and other care providers, including mentoring programs, workplace support systems for natives in the medical field and increased attention to scholarship and loan programs" (19). Over the century, the United States government has taken numerous steps to provide funding for healthcare for American Indians. However, it is incumbent on us to continually assess the effectiveness of these steps and ask if these efforts have come too late.

The Issues

With respect to scientific research, a history of distrust has been created between tribes in the Southwest region of the United States and our government. A poignant example is one experienced by the Havasupai Tribe and their interaction with investigators at Arizona State University (ASU). Members of the tribe approached investigators at ASU with the hope that these scientists could analyze blood samples from tribe members to determine if there was a genetic link within the tribe to diabetes. The tribe reasoned that this type of research could help the tribe better approach prevention and treatment of a disease that is rampant among the Havasupai people. John Martin, an anthropologist at ASU, had already gained the trust of the tribe through previous studies and had always remained very sensitive toward the Indian culture. He forwarded the concerns of the Havasupai people to Dr. Therese Markow who headed a research project that was initially describes at investigating the rampant diabetes on the reservation. Many members of the tribe were hesitant to give their blood, which they consider to be sacred, however many of them were urged on by others who were optimistic for a solution to the diabetes frequency in Supai. All the members of the tribe had to do to become part of the study was to give verbal and written consent on a consent form, with the form indicating that their blood would only be used to investigate diabetes. However, Dr. Markow's project quickly expanded after she received funding to research other diseases such as schizophrenia and alcoholism. Further funding was also provided to look into the origins of the Native American people that further extended the research aims.

The Havasupai Tribe may have never uncovered what their blood samples were being used for had it not been for Carletta Tilousi, a member of the Havasupai Tribe. Attending a doctoral dissertation defense by a student who used the same blood samples that Dr. Markow collected, Carletta discovered that that the samples were being used for a completely different study that had no bearing on diabetes research. Soon the Havasupai Tribe found published

articles that concluded that the Havasupai people did not originate in the Grand Canyon but rather that they crossed the Bering Sea to finally settle in the Canyon. This kind of research contradicts everything that the Supai people stand for and the pride in the land that they believe has always been theirs. These publications were all predicted on data reached from analyzing the blood samples initially given to investigate diabetes. The Havasupai people sued Arizona State University and recently reached a settlement in 2010 where the university's Board of Regents agreed to pay 41 tribe members \$700,000 each. For many Havasupai Indians this settlement was not enough and they feel betrayed. The tribe has since banished all Arizona State University employees from their reservation. (9)

Along with a sense of distrust Native Americans feel, there are also issues due to an extensive lack of funds as well as concerns with promises that have not been kept with regards to the Indian Health Service. Mary Cathleen Wilson, a Senior Project Coordinator within the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention at the University of Arizona, explains that the IHS is only funded at 1/3 of the funds necessary to provide quality care. She sees the severe effects of underfunding on the Tohono O'odham Reservation which she, herself, is part of. (10) Nicole Soeng and Julie Chinitz explain, "The failure to ensure access to quality health care for all Native people is especially troubling given the shocking health disparities faced by Native people, who generally live sicker and die younger than do members of other groups in the United States". (11)

A further isolation of the Native Americans has been created due to their different cultural beliefs. Whether it is distrust or simply a lack of understanding of more Western practices, there is a definite divide. One of these differences can be seen in the American Indians' approach to health and wellness.

Native American Healing

According to Dr. Carlos Gonzales, a physician and a member of the Pascua Yaqui Nation, Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM) is holistic in its approach. He explains it has a "circular way of thinking, in which an illness occurs due to a certain event and one must address this problem" if they are to heal (12). Illness is a state of disharmony and one must bring his/her life back into balance to restore the harmony. It is difficult to fully understand all the practices of Native American medicine because many elders refuse to reveal them out of fear that their methods and people will be taken advantage of, a reasonable fear based on previous experiences such as these described above. Traditional methods of healings are somewhat similar among Native American people, however each ceremony has unique aspects that are unique to that specific tribe.

Herbal Remedies

The practice of using herbal remedies in Native American practice is different to that of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine believes in isolating specific ingredients from a plant or synthesizing analogues and then using that in collaboration with other ingredients as a remedy. However, American Indians look at a plant in its integrated form and do not isolate the ingredients. Many herbal recipes are considered sacred by the Natives and are never recorded. There is a strong fear that many of these healing methods may be lost forever if younger generations of American Indians do not continue with these ways of healing.

Medicine Man/Woman

American Indians greatly respect traditional healers, also known as medicine men, who bridge the gap between an individual's natural and spiritual worlds. Healing is considered an extremely sacred aspect of Native American traditional medicine. Those treating the ill know to avoid eye contact, speak in the third person when addressing a serious diagnosis and to never address the chances of survival unless directly asked by the patient (15). American Indians view a medicine man or woman as very holy because he/she is fulfilling the healing process by the way of the Indian's Creator. Each medicine man or woman has his/her unique practice of healing which is prized within the reservation. Harmony through healing is a joint commitment between both the medicine man and the patient in which all of the patient's wishes are honored (16). A medicine man has the ability to stop the progression of a disease due to his/her personal power to affect the forces of nature (17).

Each medicine man contains his own medicine bundle, which is specific to that individual and its content is often kept a secret due to the holiness of the bag and its importance to the tribe. These bags are often buried with the medicine man at death to continue to protect its owner in his afterlife. The bundles contain some items that are sacred and others may be necessary for healing (18). Only the owner of a medicine bundle fully understands and is aware of the contents of the bag, which makes it difficult for outsiders to understand the function and application of the contents.

Purifying and Cleansing of body

Sweat lodges are often used among American Indians to purify themselves. However the true meaning of the ceremony is not in its name being more so a process of rebirth than the experience felt in a sauna. The Native Americans refer to this ceremony as *oenikika*, which translates to "breath of life". The ceremony takes place within a circular structure and is covered with tarps to prevent the escape of heat. The ceremony is led by a medicine man and includes the use of sacred herbs such as sage, sweet grass, cedar and tobacco (18). The ceremony is a time for prayer, renewal and personal reflection. Many individuals reject treatment by way of allopathic medicine and decide instead to work through meditation as well as cleansing via sweat lodges to bring themselves closer to the Mother Earth.

The smudging ceremony is a common practice among Native Americans to rid a person of any negative thoughts and energy. It is believed that before a person can be healed completely, an individual's negative energy must be eliminated. During this ceremony, similar herbs are used to that of the sweat lodge. Once the herbs are burned, the smoke from the fire is fanned over the individual participating. The smoke then carries the prayers of the individual up to the Creator. All negative spiritual energies are then removed from that person and further healing techniques can be performed.

Interconnectedness of world

American Indians are strong believers in the interconnectedness of the world and the role that the Indian people play within the nature that surrounds them. A key component to this philosophy is the power of the circle and its role in Native symbolic thinking. "It represents unity, strength, protection, infinity, and spirituality. Thus, it is used in ritual, religion, art,

architecture, ceremony, and social interaction” (13). If one is not in perfect harmony within this circle, with the forces of nature and the universe, then a person’s well-being is affected. When one has fallen out of connectedness with their surroundings, then illness occurs. There is a strong belief that illness results from supernatural forces and serious illness results when an evil spirit captures the soul of an individual (14). Despite the level of illness, American Indians believe that once harmony is restored between the individual and the world the individual will return back to health. An individual’s social group and lifestyle are thought to play a more important role in harmony and preventing disease (16).

Traditional Native American medicine emphasizes the connection between the medicine man, the patient, and then The Creator. It works to restore the balance between the patient and the Earth. This is not only accomplished via physical means such as herbal remedies but by rectifying the emotional state of an individual which will in turn restore the body to its previous wholeness. This type of healing is difficult to replicate because the practices are often extremely sacred and specific to each medicine man as well as each tribe.

Allopathic Medicine

Allopathic medicine utilizes a more logical and linear approach towards healing. Many of us are much more familiar with the allopathic approach to medicine because it is the predominant form of medicine practices in most physician’s offices and hospitals nationwide. Allopathic medicine is very regimented in its approach and is universal throughout the United States. All physicians are required to undertake the same basic training, via attendance in medical school and are accepted into the profession through common examinations. Below, I have compiled a collection of responses from various individuals in the medical field. Each individual was asked to define allopathic medicine and whether or not there is place in allopathic medicine for traditional medicine practices.

Dr. S.B. ENT, Phoenix:

All of us who attended allopathic medical schools and then residencies in the USA are trained as allopathic physicians. That is to say, we treat patients with medicines and surgical procedures that have been tested and shown to statistically improve the health and welfare of our patients. This is not always the case, however, as I have taken classes and exposed to surgical procedures which may be out of vogue the following year. I'm not sure how these guys get away with introducing new procedures without complete testing, but that is my experience.

On a daily basis, following the guidelines of my training and reading, I make a diagnosis to the best of my ability and then either prescribe a medicine or offer the patient surgery. Now, I don't have complete freedom. I cannot prescribe medicine or perform surgery when it is not indicated. If I am caught using medicine incorrectly or performing procedures which are not indicated I can be sued, lose my license, or go to jail. So, once I make the diagnosis, I am limited to a paradigm, I treat x disease with this medicine and y disease with that surgery.

Dr. E.S. Pediatrician, Tucson:

I would say that I practice evidence-based medicine as much as that is possible, with sensitivity to people's cultural beliefs. I try to give people reasons for treating or not treating, but I am flexible if they use methods that are not harmful even though there may not be good evidence to support it. There are strong psychological factors in many disease processes, so recognizing that and helping people approach those issues in a manner they feel comfortable with is the most productive.

Dr. J.S. Emergency Physician, Phoenix:

As an MD who uses evidence based medicine, I never really encountered the term "allopathic medicine" until approximately 20 years ago when homeopathic persons (who I will not call Physicians) wanted to distinguish themselves from medical physicians like myself. We believe in treating patients with medicines and therapeutic measures (ie: surgery for appendicitis) that have been proven either by clinical based trials or historical means. So to answer your question, I first make a diagnosis based on the patient's history, physical and ancillary tests. After making the diagnosis I prescribe treatment based on evidence based medicine for the particular diagnosis. As you know many medicines (ie: digitalis) are either derived from plant or based on natural products and have been proven beneficial but unless clinical trials prove what you are calling Traditional Native American practices beneficial, then it will be difficult to incorporate these practices into medicine, because their results are based on antidotal or placebo affect. In conclusion I consider myself an evidence-based physician, not an allopathic physician, although others may call me that.

Dr. T.E. Surgery, Tucson

My concept of moderate allopathic medicine is that it is science- and provable fact- based. There is still some "art" involved in the application of moderate medicine, particularly in the surgical field, but primarily the focus of every specialty needs to be on concepts and methods that have been proven utilizing the scientific method and are based on studies that demonstrate reproducible facts. The "art" part of modern medicine comes from the fact that it still is applied by human beings, and consequently there is some variability to the effectiveness of the application. Contrary to popular opinion, allopathic medicine does seek to promote maintenance of wellness as well as treat disease. Unfortunately the nature of our current delivery systems dictates that modern medicine by necessity deals primarily with treating disease once it has been demonstrated. The failure of the moderate allopathic medical concept to achieve wellness and the continuous freedom from disease, as opposed to the successful treatment of disease, is largely a result of the individual patient not being engaged in his/her own pursuit of wellness and avoidance of disease causing factors.

My view of traditional or Native American medicine, although not based on personal experience, is that it emphasizes much more of a cultural basis to treatment of disease as well as maintenance of a disease-free state. Clearly some of the treatments involved in traditional medicine can be shown to have true and reproducible physiological defects. Many of the treatments however emphasize more cultural and psychological effects, which although they can be very real in terms of results for the patient, are not based on reproducible evidence produced by the scientific method. The effectiveness of these more traditional treatments lies in the belief of the patient that these approaches will be effective. Consequently it will be very difficult for a non-traditional treating physician to employ these methods effectively. I would think it would be much more likely that a traditional medicine environment could employ allopathic medical treatments, rather than standard modern medical facilities being able to employ traditional methods effectively.

Combined Response from Retired Nurse and Paramedic, Tucson, AZ

As a nurse and a paramedic, we have practiced traditional (allopathic) western medicine in our careers. Over the decades, traditional western medicine has provided significant improvements and successes in health outcomes such as:

- 1) Appropriate use of medications for hypertension, hyperlipdemia, diabetes, etc.*
- 2) Acute interventions for cardiac and stroke events to prevent severe organ damage*
- 3) Chemotherapies / treatment modalities reducing mortality in cancer patients*
- 4) Life-saving surgical interventions for a multitude of acute care problems*

That said, we also believe the health and well-being of our ourselves and our patients should be a combination of practices...traditional, holistic and integrating the beliefs/practices of our native cultures. The core of excellent health and well-being is the practice of a healthy lifestyle. For success, these healthy lifestyle skills must be taught at an early age! We must also teach individuals that without a healthy mind, body and spirit... no magic pill or medical intervention will completely alleviate their health problem. There are certainly "pure traditionalists" out there who would take issue with that statement, but fortunately those attitudes are slowly changing. This is evidenced by the acceptance of individuals such as Andrew Weil, who through research, practice and teachings, has demonstrated that "alternative" care modalities can be successful in the treatment of a medical condition. Let us hope that our traditionalists can also open their minds to our native cultures as well... we have much to learn from them.

From these responses, it is clear that there are various opinions among healthcare professionals as to the appropriate place for traditional medicine in allopathic medicine and vice versa. There are areas of medicine where this integration is more accepted, such as family medicine or pediatrics, whereas fields such as surgery are more regimented in their approach to treatment and therefore are not quite as accepting of alternative methods of healing.

Challenges to the Integration of Traditional Medicine

The World Health Organization (WHO) explains that while there are great benefits to traditional/alternative medicine, there are great challenges that must be overcome before these practices can be integrated into allopathic medicine. Citing the increasing popularity particularly in developing countries, the WHO lists the promising aspects of traditional medicine as “[...] comparatively low cost; low level of technological input; and growing economic importance” (20).

Many of those in developing countries have never had exposure to modern medicine. Similarly, Native Americans living on reservations may be extremely far from medical facilities that can provide them care through the Indian Health Service (IHS). Transportation is a large concern for these individuals. This can be exacerbated by the fact that the IHS, like any other governmental organization, is subject to funding cuts and it may not be able to provide care once the individual has made the long trip. If IHS facilities are unable to provide effective care then the patient must seek outside health care, which can often be an astronomical cost for an individual living on a reservation. This is where a tribe’s medicine man is vitally important in improving the well-being of that individual through traditional practices.

Traditional medicine does not use the most recent technological advancements to treat patients relying on ancient healing methods that are often not as costly. Many of the treatments used by Native Americans involve using ingredients of the Earth. American Indians still have very strong ties with their history and culture and will only use treatments within their culture in order to preserve their practices for future generations.

The WHO goes into further detail to explain the challenges that must be overcome with regards to traditional medicine (TM). “They include: the varying degree with which it is recognized by governments; the lack of sound scientific evidence concerning the efficacy of many of its therapies; difficulties relating to the protection of indigenous TM knowledge; and problems in ensuring its proper use” (20). The United States government currently has no national policy with regards to traditional/alternative medicine. There is no commonly included education for doctors, pharmacists and nurses within their respective professional schools to inform these professionals about alternative medicine approaches. The Office for Alternative Medicine in the National Institutes of Health was created in 1992 by the United States Congress and was transformed into the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCAAM) in 1999. In 2000, under President Clinton, the White House Commission on Alternative Medicine was formed and was responsible for “developing a set of legislative and administrative recommendations to maximize the benefits of CAM [complementary and alternative medicine] for the general public” (20). The Commission published its final report in March of 2002 with 29 official recommendations that are each broken down extensively. However since its publication, no progress has been made on behalf of the United States government to implement any of the recommendations made by the commission. Further, the report did not come without controversy. Many in the academic and health care fields have scrutinized the recommendations of the commission and have questioned its logic, feasibility and practicality.

One of the most prominent reasons traditional and alternative medicine practices are not being incorporated into allopathic medicine is the lack of funding to support the effort. The

research that is needed with regards to the safety and efficacy of alternative medicine practices is not profitable to pharmaceutical companies or even academic institutions. There is no incentive to conduct this research which could provide the data to address the skepticism that is prominent in much of our society. Some could argue that alternative medicine practices are not cost-effective because unlike allopathic medicine, it is not strictly evidence based. Evidence-based medicine is defined as, “The judicious use of the best current available scientific research in making decision about the care of patients” (21). In most cases, allopathic medicine is relatively straightforward in its approach to treatment, and a patient will become well relatively quickly. Alternative medicine does not have as direct an approach focusing instead on the whole person and their harmony in life; this may result in healing methods being performed that may not be necessary, but are part of a traditional complex set of treatments.

There are no guarantees that alternative medicine will work. The funding and support is not there to explore the possibility and power of alternative medicine becoming a part of our daily lives like allopathic medicine has become. It becomes difficult to know how an individual will respond to alternative medicine practices. In some cases using alternative medicine can result in great relief, but in others no improvement can be seen in the patient. However, isn't the unpredictable nature of the outcome and the 'one size doesn't fit all' very similar to allopathic medicine treatments? There is a fear among the public when it comes to alternative medicine because it is often such a foreign and abstract idea. What will it take to have individuals trust the methods of non-western medicine? This is why research and funding is so vital.

In addition, it is almost impossible to define alternative and traditional medicine. While this review focuses on the healing practices performed on American Indian reservations in the Southwest region of the United States of America, traditional medicine practices vary widely by region and culture. It becomes difficult to work through all of these practices and identify those that are more effective than others when there is no financial backing or interest to explore alternative methods of treatment.

Another issue that arises is how one can interconnect two practices of medicine that could not be more different from the other. There is little if any dialogue between physicians and alternative medicine practitioners currently. Many healing methods among the American Indians are so sacred that few people know about them. These treatment methods are passed on within each tribe and are kept secret from outside communities. This is mostly out of fear that their practices will be exploited and that the traditional practices that they are struggling to hold on to will be lost in future generations.

Curing versus Healing

Dr. Andrew Weil explains, “We know health well in its absence”. He explains that most physicians would define health as the absence of a disease (22). Is this really how a state of being that keeps up alive and well should be defined? Health should be explained as wholeness, not only in body but also in mind and spirit. Furthermore, “[...] health is a dynamic and harmonious equilibrium of all the elements and forces making up and surrounding a human being” (22).

Miriam Webster dictionary defines the word ‘cure’ as “recovery or relief from disease” (23). Curing aligns strongly with my idea of allopathic treatment today. An individual goes to the doctor when he/she has a cold and is prescribed antibiotics to cure that person back to health. In

other cases, more extensive intervention is necessary and an individual may need surgery. More often than not, that is all the treatment that they will need: they are then free of disease and ready to resume normal daily life. The act of curing fails to recognize the emotional aspects of recovery. In a lecture given by Dr. Weil, he asked the audience to think of all the “anti” medications that are so common in our society. These kinds of drugs are only necessary if our body is completely out of balance. Those kinds of treatment provide a quick fix for a patient that will most likely result in further harm in the long run. For example, anti-depressants should only be used for a short period because it trains our body to stop producing serotonin. It then makes our body dependent on the drug because an individual feels worse off without the drug than that individual felt before treatment. A better approach to treatment would be to understand the underlying cause of this depression and then to heal that person with other therapies. Another example is widespread use of antacids, which suppress many of the good acids in the stomach that our body needs to function. Long-term use of this type of drug will leave an individual in worse shape than to begin with. An individual should evaluate their diet and lifestyle prior to medications like this and should not rely on a quick fix that makes a patient feel cured immediately. (24)

Miriam Webster dictionary defines the word ‘heal’ as “to make sound or whole” (23). American Indians emphasize the process of healing within their culture and medicine. The mind is treated first, and further healing follows within the body. Healing understands the necessity of homeostasis within the body. If one aspect of the body is out of sync then it must be a result of another part of the body that has moved away from homeostasis or some outlying cause that is the root of the body’s distress.

Recommendations

In summary, this is not to suggest that allopathic medicine has no place in our daily society. Allopathic medicine saves lives on a regular basis and has been an integral part in the various medical advancements made in the past. There is a place for both traditional medicine practices as well as allopathic medicine in modern medicine. It is up to the individual caring for a patient to provide individualized treatment and understand which parts of traditional and allopathic medicine should be used in treatment. In cases like trauma and diseases such as cancer, one must follow more evidence-based practices. However, physicians need to be educated in both allopathic medicine as well as various traditional medicine practices. Specifically with respect to Arizonan physicians, one has an obligation to understand the cultural beliefs of the Native American population. Understanding that a patient’s mind can have a large effect on the rest of an individual’s body is essential in treatment. We live in a society where physicians overprescribe medication and perform unnecessary procedures that are not only costly but can cause more complications. Physicians must ask themselves an underlying question of what is the real cause of the symptoms that are being presented in their patients. For example, instead of prescribing anti-depressants to a patient who is struggling psychologically, it would be much more beneficial to understand the reasons behind these symptoms instead of just prescribing pills that will provide a quick fix. The mental and spiritual states of a patient are essential to treatment and recovery. Traditional Native American medicine understands this fully.

There must be some kind of incentives created for medical schools to incorporate traditional medicine practices into medical school curriculum. The University of Arizona College of Medicine should be used as an example for other institutions of how to incorporate traditional

medicine into a curriculum. The College of Medicine has an Integrative Medicine Distinction Track and Integrative Medicine Elective Rotation for medical students as well as an Integrative Medicine Residency and Fellowship Program for residents. Education is key not only for medical students but also for the public as well as other health professionals. Patients should know what their options are with regards to treatment and wellness.

While traditional medicine practice and allopathic medicine are very different, there are pros and cons to each. It seems most effective for physicians to utilize parts of both practices in order to provide the best care possible to each individual patient. By bridging this gap, one can hope that better care can be provided to the Native American population and gain some of the trust that may have been lost in the past. Such changes would certainly also benefit the general public, enabling the best of both practices to treat the individual, no matter their heritage. Changes must be implemented at a governmental level as well as on a local level to ensure that changes are being implemented from the highest level to the most simple of physician-patient interactions.

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Addendum

Association of American Indian Physicians, 20th Annual Cross Cultural Medicine Workshop, April 26-29, 2012

This conference was a great supplement to the wealth of knowledge I have learned throughout the process of gathering information for my honors thesis. The conference furthered my understanding of the stark contrasts between Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM) and allopathic medicine. TIM believes strongly in the idea of balance. When an individual is in balance then that person is healthy: however, disease results from imbalance. There must be this balance between mind, body, and spirit: then a person can fit perfectly into the environment around them. This environment can include one's family, friends, community as well as the Earth. This connectedness with the environment allows an individual to feel part of something greater than oneself. Native Americans repeatedly use the seven cardinal directions in their cultural and healing ceremonies, which each represents different values and ideas that are important to that individual tribe. Furthermore, TIM is a very intuitive process. A healer will look at all aspects of an individual's life to aid that individual in healing him/herself. It is a very inclusive practice compared to allopathic medicine, which is very reductionist in nature. Allopathic medicine breaks down the problem into its simplest form to approach treatment.

All physicians can learn from the ways of TIM. It is not about simply looking at an individual and his/her symptoms but understanding all that encompasses that individual. TIM emphasizes a non-linear approach to healing, rather than the linear evidence-based approach of allopathic physicians. By no means is an evidence-based approach wrong: however, this kind of thinking glosses over the human aspect of that individual. TIM is not a "one size fits all" practice, and many healers customize healing methods to that individual. TIM has become more accepting of allopathic medicine. However, treatment via allopathic medicine is limited, and one needs complete healing in order to restore balance. Traditional Indian Medicine will always be subject to scrutiny by some physicians, but it is a physician's duty to understand an individual's heritage and philosophy in order to provide the best treatment possible as well as to remain respectful of that person's beliefs.