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Natural medicine practice offers alternatives

ON THE STREET
BETH COPE

There are many who dismiss “natural medicine” as hocus-pocus. And to them Victoria Goldsten, founder of the Washington Institute of Natural Medicine, says ... nothing.

“I’m not really here to convince them,” she said of her work at the 15-year-old practice, which recently relocated to Friendship Heights. “At first it was difficult, and there were more skeptics than there are now.”

Now the business draws plenty of clients who are interested in the benefits of homeopathy, hypnotherapy, acupressure and reiki — just some of the institute’s practices. “I just tell them from my experience what I’ve been able to do over the years,” said Goldsten.

And that experience started with traditional medicine.

When she was beginning her career, Goldsten trained and worked as a nurse. But she found the field unsatisfying, in part because the rapid pace left too little time to spend with patients, so she left hospitals behind and began working as an interior designer. Some time later, her own health problems — sinus infections, which she treated with near-monthly

doses of antibiotics, and an inflamed gall bladder — encouraged her to study a different type of healing.

“I started using homeopathic remedies, and it was like a miracle. I was off antibiotics for 14 years,” she said.

Inspired, she became a natural health-care, or holistic, nurse. She treated patients in her home until the practice outgrew her space.

These days Goldsten, who heads up four offices and more than a dozen practitioners, doesn’t shun traditional medicine; she just doesn’t turn to it first. “I’m not against it; I’ve tried to reduce it. ... My first path is, I’m gonna try my herb.”

And she certainly doesn’t advocate against traditional doctors. “I always encourage people to see their medical doctors also. ... I believe in traditional medicine.”

But she also believes that alternative methods can address subtleties that physicians might miss — as well as problems that are not yet considered problems under traditional medicine, such as signs of a “pre-disease state.”

She said some of the issues her practice has been able to address have included menopause-related issues, skin conditions, body pain, arthritis and digestive issues. “I never realized how many people were constipated,” she said.

She works on these issues with a team of about 10 practitioners trained in areas ranging from herbology to colon hydrotherapy. The services available include massage, reflexology, bodywork, chakra balancing and magnetic therapy. Some patients come in for a particular service, while others simply present their concern and seek advice on how to treat it.

The institute does not deal directly with insurance companies, and costs vary depending on the service and the practitioner seen, but some of the staff members offer certain insurance-related discounts.

The Washington Institute for Natural Medicine, which moved in May from Connecticut Avenue, is now located at 5101 Wisconsin Ave. NW in Suite 100. Office hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, though many practitioners see patients outside those hours. For details, visit: washingtoninstituteofnaturalmedicine.com.



Victoria Goldsten, founder of the Washington Institute of Natural Medicine, with practitioners and staff members at the new Friendship Heights office