

East meets west

Ancient wisdom and modern science combine for local doctor

BY LESLEY ANN BECK

Dr. Nina Molin combines the ancient wisdom of ayurveda with the latest in Western medical science, a practice that she finds successful and satisfying.

Molin, the founder of the Anandahealth Center for Integrative Medicine in Lenox, Mass., is an ayurvedic practitioner as well as a board-certified physician in internal medicine. She is a staff physician at Canyon Ranch in the Berkshires.

"I initially got interested in ayurveda over 12 years ago when I was a resident in internal medicine," Molin said in a recent interview. "Someone gave me a tape. I was listening to it on the thruway, and I had a real "ah ha" moment. I felt something had changed within me just by listening to it."

As part of her residency program, Molin lived in an ayurvedic health center for two weeks and studied with the director there who was a medical doctor and an ayurvedic physician. She said, "I felt it really filled in the gaps in what I was not learning in my residency."

Molin notes the differences in philosophy and approach. "For one, ayurveda looks at the root cause of illness, which unfortunately in Western medicine, we don't always do. When someone gets reflux, we give them an antacid. Ayurveda would look at what the root cause of the reflux might be, change the physiology from there and cure the illness.

"Ayurveda approaches people as individuals. We are learning in science the importance of individual biochemistry and genetics in terms of preventing and treating illness. Ayurveda has known that for 5,000 years. Five people who walk in with a headache may walk out with five different prescriptions in ayurveda.



Photo by Christina Krahforst

Dr. Nina Molin is the founder of the Anandahealth Center for Integrative Medicine in Lenox, Mass.

"Third, ayurveda looks at healthy aging and prevention. In Western medicine, we have tests such as mammograms, PSAs and colonoscopies that are considered prevention, but are actually early detection, which is completely different. They play a role in decreasing morbidity and mortality, but what about 10 years earlier, when the physiology started to change? Ayurveda looks at healthy aging, looking at the constitution, looking at balance through the seasons, the time of day, through pulse diagnoses. You can detect imbalances in the pulses before symptoms even occur. Which is very different from Western medicine's approach."

Molin offers some success stories. "One woman I worked with, who was in her early for-

ties, had severe asthma. She was on four medications and her inhaler, and she said, 'I'm just not going to make it.' She had a high level position, like so many people with chronic health problems. So we took an ayurvedic approach and removed some foods that were exacerbating her asthmatic conditions, such as dairy. We used herbs that are anti-inflammatory such as licorice and turmeric and ginger. We used some breathing exercises and within a few months she was tapering off her medication. When she came back to see me a year later, she looked incredible. She said, 'I am off all my medication. My pulmonologist at Tufts can't believe it.'"

One of Molin's teachers, Maya Tiwari, says that one of

the major aspects of healing is a commitment to inner harmony. Molin has found this to be important. "We approach health from the body/mind perspective. In ayurveda, imbalances in the physiology are directly affected by emotional trauma, mental stresses and imbalances. This is ancient wisdom — not only do the mind and body interact, but also the spirit.

"We're talking about the mind, the body and the spiritual aspect of our health. These are all the unique aspects of ayurveda that drew me, and then a few years later, when I had to deal with my own health issues, I really had to start integrating this into my life. It involved everything from changing my job to changing how I ate to bringing meditation into my life and beginning an in-depth practice in ayurveda. There is nothing like dealing with your own health issues to catapult you into trying something new.

"When I started studying it more in depth for myself, I had to start studying it in depth for the people that I work with, because everyone I see has chronic disorders that are based in imbalances in lifestyle, rhythm, nutrition, stress. Most of the diseases we have as we age are caused by imbalances in lifestyle, not because we're born with them. Osteoporosis, heart disease, cancer, obesity — ayurveda addresses that."

Another of Molin's patients who came for an ayurvedic consultation had had bloating and gas for a long time, to the point of embarrassment. She admitted to eating a lot of salads. Molin asked her to stop eating raw foods, and a week later, her problem was alleviated. Molin helped another woman who had been taking sleeping pills for seven years. Using ayurveda, she changed

her bedtime and regained a natural rhythm, allowing her to stop using the sleeping pills.

"This to me is healing. This is why I became a physician," Molin commented. "Not just to give people drugs. Now, sometimes they need them and I do prescribe drugs. But not for everybody. There are a lot of other avenues to explore to increase vitality and wellness, and ayurveda is a great paradigm.

"As a medical doctor, I'm aware of what Western science has brought us. In some circumstances medications are appropriate and we integrate aspects of ayurveda along with Western medicine. In some cases, people can decrease or discontinue their medication, but that is on an individual basis, and is dependent on what kind of illness or disease they may have."

For somebody with a family history of heart disease with very high cholesterol, Molin says, "I'm going to talk to them about Lipitor or statin drugs. I also talk to them about a dosha-based diet, and about stress-reduction, which has been shown in studies to reduce blood pressure and free radicals. At times I use ayurveda as part of an integrative approach. Ayurveda can be used on its own or as part of an integrative medical practice."

One of the central concepts of ayurveda is bringing consciousness to everything in life. "From an ayurvedic point

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— Dr. Nina Molin

of view, all of life, all of nature, evolved from pure consciousness," Molin says. "And we continue to evolve in life, because we have this sense of wholeness or consciousness in every single cell of our being. We are in balance when our body and mind, our sense of wholeness, is integrated. If some aspect of our body or mind forgets about where it came from, from that pure consciousness, disease can ensue, for example, a tumor. Chemotherapy and surgery may be used, but for the tumor to be corrected, the cells need to remember their true nature — the field of undifferentiated wholeness or pure consciousness. Ayurveda has techniques, through nutrition, lifestyle, exercise, through meditation, through daily practices, that help connect body/mind with consciousness, so we can maintain health, regain health, sustain health."

The way that this field of pure consciousness affects our physiology and our temperament is through the concept of doshas. Molin says, "The doshas — these forces of body

and mind, these psycho-physiological forces that influence all of life — are the main concept of ayurveda in terms of understanding natural rhythms and how our own constitution resonates with that, with the seasons, with our lives, with the time of day. And we can certainly use this concept as a way of maintaining health."

There are many ways of coming to ayurveda. Molin says, "I can recommend to you a balancing diet, and certain yoga postures, and out of those recommendations, you'll start to get in touch with that inner contentment, that sense of wholeness. That's one way of approaching it. We can use a number of ways of reigniting consciousness, through meditation, through the foods we eat, through hugging your children, through having compassion for other people's uniqueness.

"In ayurveda, we treat the imbalances so that your natural constitution can shine through. If I stay up late and watch a lot of TV, and am spaced-out the next day, I have an imbalance. If I'm annoyed at my kids for not lis-

tening to me, I have an imbalance. I want to treat these so my natural constitution can shine through."

Molin's initial consultation takes 90 minutes and may include recommendations for herbal supplements, massage treatments and exercise such as yoga, as well as dietary changes. But the key, she says, is the commitment to inner harmony.

"Ayurveda is about being well, not as an end in and of itself, but to live our life's purpose. It resonates with our family, even our community's health.

"It's about having a blissful life. Ananda means bliss. When I say bliss, I mean every level. And how could you have a life filled with bliss without it affecting everyone around you? Food, yoga, meditation, your work — all these are practices that support the bliss, your purpose."

Contact The Anandahealth Center for Integrative Medicine in Lenox, Mass., at 413-822-0852 or visit www.ananda-health.com

Dr. Molin recommends these books on ayurveda: "The Path of Practice: A Woman's Book of Ayurvedic Healing," and "Ayurveda: A Life of Balance" by Bri. Maya Tiwari

"The Book of Ayurveda: A Holistic Approach to Health and Longevity" by Judith H. Morrison

"The 3-Season Diet: Eat the Way Nature Intended" and "Body, Mind and Sport" by John Douillard