

Operator of new clinic in Saukville says 'choice' is more than just a name

There is nothing New Age about the treatments Crystal Urban offers at the newly opened Choice Integrated Medicine clinic in Saukville.

In fact, Urban insists, many of her healing methods as a doctor of naturopathic medicine draw from ancient practices.

Naturopathic medicine concentrates on whole-patient wellness. Proponents say it strives to address the underlying causes of health conditions rather than focusing solely on symptomatic treatment.



“What we are about is all in the name — I want to offer patients health-care choices,” Urban said. “The tag line for the business is ‘It’s about options.’”

Those choices include the use of acupuncture, Chinese herbs, Qi Gong and extended one-on-one patient counseling.

“I believe my practice is as much about preventive care as it is about treating symptoms,” Urban said.

The naturopathic clinic opened this month in a portion of the Magic Touch cleaning service building at 902 S. Main St., on the village’s south side.

One wall of her office is devoted to a rack of jars of imported Chinese herbs, which are used in medicines and poultices. There are also two small treatment rooms with examination tables.

“I am still waiting for the sign to be delivered, and the business cards are coming tomorrow,” Urban said during an interview last week in

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the office she characterized as a work in progress.

Her arrival in Saukville is the latest leg in a global journey for Urban.

She grew up on a northern Wisconsin dairy farm, and pursued a bachelor's degree in biology at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

"My first career was as a corporate biologist doing wetland delineations and identifying plant species. I found I wanted to learn about those plants and what they were used for," Urban said.

That led to a master of science degree in Oriental medicine and a doctorate in naturopathic medicine, both from the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Ore.

It is the oldest fully accredited naturopathic medical school in North America.

Although naturopathic medicine is licensed in a handful of states, Wisconsin is not one of them. However, Urban is board certified by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine and is a state-licensed health-care provider.

That means Urban must work in collaboration with other health-care specialists when things like prescriptions or specific courses of medical treatment are needed.

She said she is already networking with health-care specialists in the area.

Urban operated the Gentle Healing Acupuncture and Natural Medicine clinic in Eagle River for more than 11 years, then practiced in New Zealand for a year.

"Before you can get a work visa there, you have to demonstrate you have a skill that is needed and that you will not be replacing a native worker," Urban said.

Much of her time in New Zealand was spent making house calls, often caring for patients with severe health problems, like cancer.

"There is a completely different attitude there to health care, because there is nationalized medicine. It is not corporate medicine. People in New Zealand see health care as their right, not something they can have only if they can afford it," Urban said.

She resists the suggestion that her practice is at odds with Western medical care offered in the United States.

"The problem with medical practice here, and it is no fault of the doctors, is that they are allowed only a very short amount of time with each patient. They have quotas they have to fill each day," Urban said.

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“I see all types of patients. I like to spend as much time as needed with each patient to get to know their habits and the roots of their problems so we can come up with a holistic solution. It doesn't have to be a case of choosing one form of health care or the other.”

Urban has countless stories of how health-care solutions have been developed by getting to know the patient.

“One of my patients was a truck driver who said he just felt lousy. He said the one thing he wouldn't do was give up coffee, and then admitted he drank coffee all day,” she recalled.

“I thought about it, and then said, ‘I'm not going to ask you to give up coffee. You can drink as much as you want. I just want you to drink the same amount of water for every cup of coffee you have.’ The rationale was you can only drink so much in a day. He came back a few months later very happy, and asked what else could he do to improve his health.”

Urban said the case taught her a valuable lesson.

“People don't like to be told they need to change, so I work with the patient to come up with way to reach an outcome we both want,” she said.

Urban said people are usually willing to embrace natural medicine as a care option, often citing home remedies they remember from their childhood.

“An amazing number of our modern medicines actually come from plants and roots, although sometimes their production has been synthesized now,” she said.

Because her practice is not under the umbrella of traditional medical care, Urban said, the care is not covered by most health insurance.

The exception is in cases where a patient has a rider for acupuncture coverage.

“I don't bill insurance. I'll give the patient an invoice and tell them they can deal with their insurance company,” Urban said.

To help patients plan for their health-care expenses, Urban said, she will post her fees on her website —

www.choiceintegratedmedicine.com — so patients know up front what the care will cost.

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Image Information: CRYSTAL URBAN BLENDS old and new in her Saukville clinic, Choice Integrated Medicine. Shelves of Chinese herbs line one wall of her office, but she also pulls treatments from the latest in naturopathic research.

Photos by Mark Jaeger