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Current Issue

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## Eastern medicine for the West; new natural health practice focused on education, integration

By Lynn Geiger

TRAVERSE CITY – Eastern medicine, or “alternative medicine” as many westerners think of it, is a growing presence in healthcare in this community.

Jill Donberg established Grand Traverse Natural Healthcare in early January with a focus on bringing an understanding of eastern healing practices to the western medical community and integrating her practice into the network of healthcare services available to area residents.

“I wanted to return to a community I knew,” said Donberg, adding that the medical resources available were a significant factor, as well. “Munson was a big pull.”

Donberg is originally from Midland but spent many summers here, her parents retired here, and she now lives with her family in Elk Rapids.

“My goal is to become a part of the



Jill Donberg, owner of Grand Traverse Natural Health Care, works with a patient in her Traverse City office. Photo by John Russell

boaters, beachcombers,  
shippers

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western medical community," said Donberg, who has a master's degree in Oriental medicine and is a diplomate of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. She is now the third nationally licensed acupuncturist practicing in Traverse City.

Donberg will offer acupuncture, massage and Chinese herbal medicine to people with acute or chronic pain due to musculoskeletal issues and provide a Chinese bulk, granular and patent pill pharmacy.

"These ancient modalities are often able to achieve results in cases that have not responded to modern medicine," she said.

Donberg's long-term goal is to specialize in women's health in the areas of obstetrics, reproductive health, and gynecological conditions.

"It's a population of people I love to work with," she said.

Donberg recognizes there is a lack of understanding of the ways of eastern health practices among western medicine practitioners – and the community at large – and views her clinic as a "gateway." She's identified what she describes as a "seed" here, a population of people who want to take responsibility for their health and don't necessarily want to take a multitude of medications, but rather are looking for alternative therapies.

Nonetheless, Michigan has lagged far behind much of the rest of the country in legislation that regulates the practice of acupuncture and licenses it as a separate healthcare profession.

"In this state, people with my credentials have to work under the supervision of a doctor," explained Donberg, and that has resulted in Michigan having one of the lowest populations of acupuncturists in the country. However, legislation passed last spring paved the way toward state registration for acupuncturists who meet specific academic and clinical credentials. Donberg expects that registration to be in place by the end of 2008, but said the requirement of doctor referral is not expected to change.

Insurance coverage for alternative therapies is also rare in Michigan. Current insurance coverage of acupuncture is limited to specific situations, such as workers' compensation cases, and even then no more than 20 percent of the cost, Donberg said, adding that there are also a few select plans that address alternative treatments. Continuing legislative efforts, however, may eventually lead to the inclusion of alternative medicine treatments into standard insurance policies.

"It's such a new concept here and in the state," Donberg said. "I've seen what it can be in Seattle," where Donberg completed her graduate studies at the Seattle Institute of Oriental Medicine.

And it's that experience that has Donberg excited to launch her first practice in Michigan and establish herself in the western medical community.

"I'm here as much for the doctors as well as the patients," said Donberg. "I want to interact with them as a team."

Grand Traverse Natural Healthcare is located at 626 E.Eighth St. and can be reached by calling 929-8183. BN



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