

IN THE NEWS

NORTH HAWAII COMMUNITY HOSPITAL GRANTS PRIVILEGES TO NATUROPATHIC PHYSICIAN

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For three years, a small group of medical doctors and complementary practitioners—including a naturopathic physician, chiropractor, acupuncturist and massage therapist, met to develop a working plan for one of the first hospitals in the U.S. to embrace a vision of integrated health care—North Hawaii Community Hospital, located in Kamuela on the northern part of the island of Hawaii. This vision was primarily the brainchild of Earl Bakken, the inventor of the pacemaker and founder of the medical technology firm Medtronic. Mr. Bakken moved from Minneapolis to Hawaii to retire, but found himself elected Chairman of the Board of Directors of the hospital. Mr. Bakken knew that for this small community hospital to be successful, it had to not only offer high quality acute conventional care, but to distinguish itself as unique. Although he comes from a highly technical background, Mr. Bakken has been very interested in complementary approaches to health care for a long time.

Under Mr. Bakken's leadership, the hospital Board appointed the group of health care professionals mentioned above to the Integrated Healing Subcommittee. Their job entailed credentialing and delineating clinical privileges for the various complementary disciplines. The complementary practitioners on this subcommittee were also the first practitioners appointed to the "consulting staff" category of the medical staff.

North Hawaii Community Hospital, a 50 bed facility, opened in late May 1996. It was funded by a 12.5 million dollar grant from the state — a figure matched by the local community. The medical staff were at first preoccupied with the details of getting the hospital up and running, and the integration

of complementary practices took a back seat. Furthermore, the approval by the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee for a small natural medicine formulary was withdrawn by the officers of the medical staff, citing concerns about safety and efficacy. They then imposed a demanding process for further evaluation of all natural medicines, including proof that homeopathic medicines were safe. The complementary practitioners, as well as some of the medical doctors on staff, expressed frustration with how difficult it now was to develop a natural medicine formulary.

The disagreements between allopathic and natural medical philosophies have exposed the weaknesses and limitations of both, calling into question the romantic ideal that scientific evidence would solve everything. Nevertheless, after stringent evaluation, several natural medicines passed the test. The natural medicine formulary now consists of *Echinacea spp*, *Allium cepa* (garlic), *Zingiber officinale* (ginger), *Ginkgo biloba*, and probiotics.

There were 10 consultation appointments for naturopathic medicine during the first nine months of operation. The patients included three children with respiratory distress and pneumonia, one child with viral gastroenteritis and dehydration, as well as adults, one each with pneumonia, leukemia, herpes zoster and cellulitis. Four patients under naturopathic care were referred to the hospital: one with metastatic breast cancer and hypercalcemia, one with stomach cancer, one with incarcerated hernia, and one for elective surgery for a cystocele. There have been similar numbers of consultations for chiropractic care, acupuncture, and therapeutic massage, all with excellent outcomes.

At this time, consultations for complementary care must come at the request of the attending physician, who maintains responsibility for the overall care of the patient. Patients are given a description of the complementary services available at the time of admission, and a videotape on these services will soon be available to patients as well. Traditional Hawaiian healing, once envisioned to be part of the complementary services offered, has not yet been implemented.