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Doctor is bringing medicine back to nature

By SARAH BAHARI
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As a young girl in Iran, Lida Aghdam watched her father suffer with back pain. He never bothered with prescription or over-the-counter painkillers. Instead, her mother would heal his aches with a small flame and cup, which acted as a vacuum on the skin. After she moved to Texas with a medical degree a couple of decades later, Aghdam studied the ancient cupping technique in China. She now uses it on her patients to treat colds, aches and pains, and congestion.



Aghdam, who specializes in internal medicine and gynecology, has turned to minerals, vitamins and herbs to treat patients. "Everything here is medication, medication, medication," said the 43-year-old physician, who moved to the United States from Iran in 1987. "People are so overmedicated they're making themselves sick."

Aghdam, who is affiliated with Baylor Regional Medical Center at Grapevine and North Hills Hospital in North Richland Hills, is one of a growing number of physicians who look beyond the standard practices of modern medicine.

She is a medical doctor, but the number of naturopathic doctors has grown to 3,500, a 30 percent increase since 2002, with 300 more entering practice each year, according to the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. Fourteen states provide special licensing for naturopathic physicians. Texas does not.

Terri Deerr, the association's director, said patients feel unsatisfied with the pharmaceutical industry and are searching for more natural alternatives. "People are taking control of their health and well-being," she said. "There's an interest in all things natural."

That interest is especially high in Northeast Tarrant County, Aghdam said, where many people are well-educated and can afford to experiment with alternative medicine. Patients often come to Aghdam -- whose office is moving from Grapevine to Colleyville in two weeks -- for a second or third opinion, she said. They're so tired they can barely stand, she said. Their complexions are wan. They come toting an arsenal of pill bottles. One for blood pressure, one for cholesterol, Arthritis, Depression, Back pains, Diabetes.

Profile: Doctor laments trend of overmedication

Natural ways first

Aghdam first tells them to downsize their medicine cabinet. She prescribes magnesium, fish oil, vitamin B or other supplements. She tells them to eat broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage. "It's all about hormonal imbalances," she said. "Most illnesses can be treated with the right minerals, herbs and vitamins." If that doesn't work, Aghdam will prescribe drugs.

Fay Turpin of Haltom City began seeing Aghdam two years ago after becoming disillusioned with doctors who she says never listened. She declined to say how old she is because she said she doesn't look or act her age. She said Aghdam often takes 30 minutes to an hour talking with her and answering questions. "When I see her, I don't leave feeling sick or sad," she said. "I feel strong and healthy." "I told her if she moves to Houston, I'll drive to my appointments."

A wider experience

Aghdam grew up using natural remedies. In addition to her mom's use of the cupping technique, her grandmother treated stomachaches with ginger and various pains with tea. She was a midwife in Iran. But when she moved to the United States, she had to learn English and start over as an undergraduate and medical student in Tennessee. Medicine in this country didn't make sense to her. "Every time you visit the doctor, they want to send you away with a prescription," she said. "Even when it's not necessary." But her beliefs in naturopathic medicine only grew when she was selected by the American Medical Association to study medicine in China in 2005. Medical students there are required to study massage, herbs and natural healers. Drugs are the last resort, she said. "We believe in what comes from nature," she said. "Not what comes from chemistry."

Dr. Lida Aghdam

Age: 43

Occupation: Physician who specializes in internal medicine and gynecology.

Beliefs: People are overmedicated and should turn to minerals, vitamins and herbs.

Degree: Medical degree from East Tennessee State University.

Location: Office is moving to 7155 Colleyville Blvd., Suite 101, in Colleyville.



Aghdam's belief in natural remedies was nurtured by her mother and grandmother in Iran



In addition to cupping, Dr. Lida Aghdam uses minerals, Vitamins and herbs. “We believe in what comes from nature,” she says. “Not what comes from chemistry”