Aye, there’s the rub!

Alternative Therapies Help CeDAR Residents Through Detox and Beyond

By Joelle Klein

Getting through the holidays, school breaks, break-ups and work deadlines can be taxing on anyone. We all have our own ways of dealing with stress — some healthy, some not.

Often, those with a drug or alcohol addiction turn to the substances they’re addicted to.

The hospital’s Center for Dependency, Addiction and Rehabilitation (CeDAR) is best known for helping addicts kick their destructive habits. Part of that is finding healthy alternatives to old vices. That that end, CeDAR has long partnered with The Center for Integrative Medicine (TCFIM) at UCH to help patients alleviate stress and anxiety, combat chronic pain, and treat issues stemming from detox with remedies such as acupuncture and massage.

Now, TCFIM acupuncturists and masseuses are making house calls to CeDAR.

In the beginning… Back in 2005, Felton turned to Lisa Corbin, MD, director of TCFIM, and Ben Meyerhoff, the Center’s manager at the time. The idea was to arrange for CeDAR residents with chronic pain or complicated health histories to meet with Corbin and get treated for their complex issues. Often they received acupuncture, massage or chiropractic care.

The CeDAR patients trekked over to Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion’s (AOP) fifth floor for treatment. The TCFIM treatments were effective. The problem was the commute, which took time away from important CeDAR programs. Because CeDAR lacked the staff to accompany the patients to TCFIM, the walk over also exposed patients to risks and temptations early in their recovery process. In addition, patients who didn’t get to meet with Corbin became resentful that they were not given the option of receiving similar treatments.

So Felton and Meyerhoff arranged for a massage therapist and an acupuncturist from TCFIM to devote a certain amount of time at CeDAR every week, offering their services to anyone who elected to pay and receive them. TCFIM handled the hiring, managing and billing; CeDAR took care of space, treatment tables and scheduling, Felton said.

Now acupuncturist Lana Bradley and massage therapist Wendy Squires visit CeDAR two days a week, offering massage and full-body acupuncture treatments.

Pinpointing problems. Acupuncture, Bradley explains, has been proven to be especially successful in treating those going through

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rehabilitation and detoxification. In fact, a protocol called auricular acupuncture, which stimulates five points in the ear, is commonly used during the recovery process. It’s been reported to help with common withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, anxiety and nausea.

The acupuncturist who worked with CeDAR patients before Bradley arrived in 2011 trained the nurses to perform auricular acupuncture, so Bradley sees patients only for full body treatments, which she says helps repair the damaged mind-body-emotion connection that can accompany addiction.

Acupuncture “treats the whole person – body, mind, spirit and emotion – just as addiction impairs the whole person,” Bradley said.

Massage therapist Wendy Squires says that people come to her for relaxation.

“Basically, I get them in a relaxed mode to help decrease depression and anxiety while increasing the dopamine in their body, which is the neurotransmitter that helps to relax them,” Squires said. Massage, she added, also boosts feel-good endorphins “so they don’t have to resort to other outside medications.”

Physical, chemical. Care team assistant Angela Riley, who schedules the massage and acupuncture treatments, says the patients love these services. Massage appointments, she says, fill up every week. Acupuncture does not fill up as commonly or quickly – probably, she surmises, because CeDAR patients are getting auricular acupuncture for free and the benefits of full-body acupuncture are not as commonly known.

Felton says she’s thinking about how to educate patients on the benefits of full body acupuncture.

“Patients who actually elect and receive it have a far better experience at CeDAR,” she said.

Alternative treatments are more than just feel-good sessions that promote relaxation. Jordan Mann, TCFIM’s practice manager, explains that they offer alternative, healthy outlets for addicts to relieve stress or reduce anxiety and help kick start their bodies into making feel-good chemicals like serotonin again.

“You’ll see some people turn to anxiety medication or smoke cigarettes, but these therapies give them healthy replacements,” said Mann.

What’s more, alternative treatments have the unique ability to affect the whole body – spiritual, chemical, physical and emotional, Mann says.

It’s also about comfort, Felton adds.

“If they’re uncomfortable, they’re going to be less receptive to the message,” she said. “If they end up being more comfortable and being more satisfied, those patients are more successful when they leave.”

And most importantly, CeDAR patients still have a lot of work to do when they leave after their 30-day stay. Knowing they can relieve stress, reduce anxiety, manage chronic pain or just feel good by healthy means can help them stay clean.

“We’re looking for our patients to leave with as full a toolbox as possible so that their relapse potential will drop,” said Felton.