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HOLISTIC HEALING

Reaching
the **mind, body
and spirit** through
alternative medicine

Migraines were consuming Cristina Shaul's life. By the fall of 2007, the Davidson resident was enduring them almost monthly, with one even lasting 10 days.

"I was completely debilitated. Migraines were ruling everything I did or did not do," Shaul, 40, recalls.

When medication made her feel worse, she became part of a growing number of people turning to complementary medicine – procedures and treatments, from acupuncture to herbal medicines, which are used in addition to a traditional doctor's standard care.

Shaul made an appointment with Cristin Gregory, a licensed acupuncturist and certified Chinese herbalist who owns Wellbeing in Cornelius. Gregory practices holistic healthcare using Chinese medicine — including acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, nutrition from a Chinese perspective, lifestyle advice, and Qi Gong (a form of gentle martial arts that's pronounced CHEE gong). At Shaul's first appointment, Gregory conducted a thorough health history and discussed everything from diet to stress management. Next, Gregory inspected Shaul's tongue and checked her pulse, key imbalance reference points in Chinese medicine.

"Everybody who comes in with migraines comes in with very different causes," explains Gregory, who obtained a Masters of Science in Oriental Medicine at the National College of Natural Medicine in Portland, Oregon.

"For example, some people have menstrual-related migraines; some migraines are stress-related. I look

Cristin Gregory, owner of Wellbeing Natural Health, demonstrates Qi Gong moves.



for the root cause of a symptom, and everyone is treated as an individual. In fact, we are treating you as an individual for what you have going on that day."

Gregory recommended a variety of natural solutions for Shaul that included yoga, meditation, journaling, herbal supplements and acupuncture. Gregory also recommended an anti-inflammatory diet, focusing on eating foods known to reduce inflammation in the body, such as turmeric, ginger, green veggies and salmon.

Initially, Shaul had acupuncture three times a week, a treatment Shaul's primary care physician knew about and accepted.

"Acupuncture is based on the eastern concept of anatomy," says Gregory. "It is believed that there is a network of meridians that carry energy throughout the body. Every disease and symptom can be looked at energetically. They are caused by blockages, imbalances, deficiencies or excesses within these energetic channels. The acupuncture points lie on these meridians, and we can go in with our needles to redirect the energy flow."

After years of suffering, Shaul's last migraine was in early 2008. Shaul continues to practice the treatments she and Gregory put into place, and she periodically sees Gregory for an acupuncture tune-up.

"I do not live in fear that I am going to get a migraine because I have put all these measures in place. I am much more aware of my mind and body, and I think that is a huge benefit. She set the foundation for me to be successful going forward," says Shaul.

A mind-body-spirit approach

In November 2009, Dana DiPerna Pillsbury, a breast cancer survivor, was nearing her five-year checkup when she discovered a lump in her right armpit. A diagnosis confirmed the cancer had returned.

This time, though, DiPerna Pillsbury, 47, already had a sense of how she was going to fight it.

"I was probably like many women my age six years ago. I was a busy mom. I was teaching. I was taking care of my health on the fly. That diagnosis pushed me into a mind-body-spirit awareness of health. I started doing yoga and meditating. I started being more present," says DiPerna Pillsbury.

When DiPerna Pillsbury received this diagnosis, she knew she wanted a more holistic approach to her care. First, she visited Memorial-Sloan-Kettering in New York City because of their integrative medicine/whole-person approach. They referred her to UNC-Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center in Chapel Hill, where a multi-disciplinary team offered care that included traditional and complementary treatments.

After completing four months of post-

mastectomy chemotherapy in Charlotte, DiPerna Pillsbury spent four weeks at the Chapel Hill cancer center, Monday through Friday, receiving chemotherapy and twice-daily radiation. Following the treatments, she had surgery that removed tumors near her collarbone.

When DiPerna Pillsbury shared with her doctors that she would be receiving acupuncture, they were pleased. The center, in fact, was looking to add an acupuncturist to their staff.

"I had massage therapists who were trained in lymphedema. There were dietitians who talked to me about a good diet. There was a 'touch for health' practitioner, and they encouraged exercise and meditation," says DiPerna Pillsbury.

"Something I love about acupuncture is that it can be integrated into every other medical treatment. It will complement massage, physical therapy, and regular medicine. You can do it safely and effectively with any other medical treatment you are trying," says Gregory.

Every Friday, following her treatment in Chapel Hill, DiPerna Pillsbury would drive home to Davidson. Her first stop was Wellbeing in Cornelius for a visit with Gregory.

"With alternative medicine, you are talking about things that are very in the moment. That is one of the things I really like because there is always a lot of conversation about your body," DiPerna Pillsbury explains.

"Cristin can then identify – through checking the tongue, taking my pulse, and through specific conversation from her knowledge of diet and the inner workings of the body – what is needed. Every time I go, it is a different treatment plan because she is working on the details, but that really helps the big picture. I noticed if I missed acupuncture, I'd feel terrible. That is how I knew it was working."

Affordable treatment

With Gregory's community clinic, there's an affordable way for DiPerna Pillsbury and others to integrate acupuncture into their care. The community clinic allows up to four people to receive acupuncture at the same time at a discounted rate. Each person's care is personalized, and the treatment space is quiet. Gregory invites her patients to pay whatever they can afford.

"I decided to include community acupuncture at Wellbeing because it makes this medicine more available to the folks who



Gregory performs acupuncture on client Anita Brown.

might not otherwise be able to try it, and allows me to give back a little to the Lake Norman community," Gregory says.

"People can now afford to come in as often as their condition requires, and they are more likely to stick with their treatment plans."

This was the case for DiPerna Pillsbury, too.

"There is no way I could have done the acupuncture without the community clinic," DiPerna Pillsbury says. "Sometimes I paid \$5; sometimes I paid \$25."

Now, cancer-free, DiPerna Pillsbury is all the more resolved in the approach she took to battle cancer and regain her health.

"The way an integrative approach opens you up and teaches you about your body is so different from what we've been taught. The way to live a healthy life is to learn more about how your body works and to understand that the thoughts you think, the way you move, the experiences you have are the things that create a healthy life." **LNM**

➔ More information

Acupuncture: Involves the insertion of very fine, sterile, disposable needles into different points along the body's energy channels to return it to a state of balance.

Herbal medicine: The practice of using hundreds of different plant, animal, and mineral materials in various formulas to treat medical conditions. Formulas can be taken in the form of a powder, tea, tablet, or tincture.

Qi Gong (say CHEE gong): This meditative exercise uses an ancient series of movements to help people focus on, move, and manipulate the flow of qi, or vital energy, through their bodies. "When you are doing Qi Gong, you are doing what I would do to you if I were doing acupuncture," says Gregory.

Reiki (say RAY key): A type of energy work where the Reiki Master places her hands over the body, and without touching the patient, is able to feel and align the patient's energetic field. The Reiki Master serves as a channel for energy to flow to the patient through various hand positions.

Reflexology: Involves massaging trigger points on the feet to create balance. These points correspond to every part, gland, and organ in the body. Through the application of pressure on these points, reflexology relieves tension and improves circulation and function of the affected areas of the body.

Massage therapy: The therapeutic rubbing and kneading of the skin to release toxins from the body, which in turn boosts the immune system, improves circulation and organ function, and helps the body regain balance and optimum health.

To learn more about Cristin Gregory and her work, visit www.wellbeingnaturalhealth.com. To learn more about the services offered at Balanced Body Solutions, visit www.balanced-bodysolutions.com.