

Western medicine has alternatives in Crescent City

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Lisa Kramer was no stranger to the benefits of acupuncture when she moved to Gasquet from Colorado 32 years ago. Having researched the subject, Kramer had received treatments for stress, neck and shoulder pain, and for her knee surgery.

But Kramer hadn't been able to visit a Chinese medicinal practitioner locally until Shelly Sovola set up Five Rivers Healing Arts in Smith River, then Crescent City in 1992, at 1303 Northcrest Dr.

Sovola later combined her practice with her son, Joshua Francis, a licensed massage therapist.

Kramer took notice. "I get my body massaged from Josh to make sure I'm okay," said Kramer, "and I usually go to Shelly for tune-ups, as I call them, even though there might not be anything going on.

"They've helped me so many ways — my stress level, sleeping. At my age, 69, sleeping is a big deal.

“Sometimes, I schedule their services back to back. Which is really cool. I come out of there feeling like a noodle.”

Sovola acknowledged that her practice differs markedly from western medicine. “MDs are more about treating symptoms,” she said. “Very few know about nutrition, and if they do nutritional counseling, they can actually come under attack.

“They hear about our herbs and say, ‘Oh, yeah, you’re just a needle-sticker.’ This medicine we’re in is over 5,000 years old. It’s one of the original holistic medicines.”

Sovola began her health studies in college as a psychology major. She said she always had been interested in health, yoga and nutrition. But she shifted from traditional western medicine when, “I was introduced to polarity therapy. It changed my life, because it hinged on Chinese medicine.

“I went through adjusting techniques of the meridians, the energy flows of the body, and I felt it released a lot of emotional baggage.

“Here I was, studying psychology, and I find a system that is of a body-and-mind connection to a healing system. That started me on a whole new road. It became my passion to pursue.”

Donnetta Summers, a Crescent City resident for more than 50 years and a retired teacher now in her 70s, has been receiving treatments from Sovola for more than two decades. Summers had been struggling with a back injury and was considering treatment beyond the prescribed physical therapy – not to mention, working to avoid progressing to surgery.

“A friend recommended acupuncture,” said Summers, “but I’d heard stories of needles and thought it would be scary.

“But you don’t even feel it. (Sovola) usually does the area that needs working, such as the neck and shoulders. The needles go in and you lay there for 20 minutes or so. Then, massages in those areas afterwards.”

Summers said she’s also impressed with Sovola’s knowledge of Chinese herbs as alternative medicinal treatments. “I’m using them for keeping my immune system up for the winter, and during flu and cold season.

“Chinese herbs are my first option. Then, if I get really, really sick, I’ll go to urgent care,” said Summers.

Sovola said that both acupuncture and Chinese herbs help with a variety of issues involving internal medicine, including headaches, liver problems, gut health, allergies, the autoimmune system, injuries, and neck and back pain.

“Also, working nutritionally with patients, I can help (them) get over their irritable bowel syndrome so they can have better digestion and get rid of migraines,” Sovola said.

“I’m trained in prevention and treatment. The herbs can help them feel better, get to the bottom of their core. I’ve got allergy training, too, because you change that, the whole body begins to heal.”

Added Sovola, “What’s happened is, our quality of food, including exposure to herbicides and pesticides, (is a problem). Nutrition is really, really key in my work with people. Not everybody wants to do it, but once they give it a try, they get better.”

Sovola and her son share the Five Rivers Healing Arts Space. Francis also has a practice in Brookings.

A licensed massage therapist now for 11 years, Francis said there’s a mainstream belief that massages are primarily about relaxing - a trip to the day spa. “But in reality,” he said, “that’s the least of it. Most people I see have some sort of pain, injury or trauma they’re trying to get through, be it their backs, necks or hips,” he said.

“It’s interesting for me to try to help these people out, and rewarding to see them progress through their wellness care. A lot of people don’t understand — it’s like maintenance on your vehicle. You go so many miles, you gotta give it a tune-up.”

Crescent City resident Darlene Smith, 78, has been seeing Sovola on and off for 30 years. Smith said Sovola has used Chinese herbs to help cure Smith’s allergies and eliminate her acid reflux.

“When you think about it, how can this help me?” Smith asked rhetorically. “But the proof is in the pudding. She’s helped, and it is a wonderful science.”\