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Contrasting Alternative Medicine Availability in Western & Eastern Environments

From skepticism to admiration, traditional, naturopathic, and alternative medical practices receive mixed reviews from the American people. With a predominantly allopathically educated nation, many people are not aware of available alternatives to western medicine. This produces a monopoly of powers with allopathic physicians providing only one type of medicine: that of disease suppression. One barrier to the incorporation of alternative medical practices within western medicine may be that physicians in the United States have little opportunity within their training to examine practices that fall outside of their own traditions. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to examine how alternative medical practices are incorporated into medical school curricula in two different cultures, the US and Thailand, in order to contrast opportunities to bring more comprehensive health care to western societies. Structured interviews were conducted in Chiang Mai, Thailand with healthcare providers who were influential in the decision-making process to the format of medical schools. In the US, research on the availability for education on alternative practices was also performed in like manner. Overall, it appears that Thai allopathic medical schools structure their training and education very closely to that of western medical schools. There is a much greater availability for practicing alternative medicine on one's own (without an MD degree), however, but there are also several more elective courses on alternative therapies within attaining a medical degree. Significantly, it appears that the demand among Thai people is what differs the greatest, as they embrace and sometimes encourage alternative therapies alongside allopathic prescriptions. As a developing country, it is not surprising that Thailand's medical schools would adopt and promote developed western standards and procedures. It is encouraging, however, that many of the Thai people retain their view for holistic care and offer so many clinics and treatment options outside of the allopathic standards, as well as more electives within the MD degree. In the US, alternative therapies and holistic lifestyles seem to be slowly catching attention as health and food production deteriorate, but it does not seem to be happening within the allopathic medical schools.