In this issue of About Integrative Medicine, we highlight our efforts to improve patient outcomes through research, clinical care, and educational programs. Discover how clinician Robin Hardbattle uses martial arts and meditation to teach some of our youngest patients to manage their stress during treatment; join our upcoming programs — including a new mindfulness-based stress reduction course; learn about the wonders of turmeric; and explore our latest research study on acupuncture for the treatment of chronic pain.

Be well!

Why does MSK offer martial arts to kids in the hospital? Using martial arts in a hospital setting with young patients may seem unusual, but it is a rich and multi-layered discipline that is well suited to address the physical and emotional needs of children in pain. We adapt appropriate techniques and apply them to each child’s specific circumstances.

What are some of the biggest challenges they face? Pain, anxiety, and fear, especially since many younger patients have yet to develop the coping skills needed to deal with these challenges. For children without support, painful and distressing procedures can easily turn into traumatic lifelong memories.

How do you use martial arts to teach them coping skills? I adapt appropriate techniques and apply them to each child’s specific circumstances. In addition to developing strength, balance, and coordination, these activities help reduce anxiety and pain, improve sleep, serve as an emotional release, and provide patients with a sense of strength. Our
Finding PEACE

“We are thrilled to be able to offer this novel comparative effectiveness study to our patients with more personalized options for treatment of their chronic pain.”

Dr. Jun Mao
Chief of the Integrative Medicine Service and study principal investigator

To learn more about the Integrative Medicine PEACE trial and determine your eligibility, email medpeacestudy@mskcc.org.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Robin Hardbattle

sessions also lay the groundwork for a child to develop mind-body practices. For example, when I have a child work out his or her frustration with a focus mitt, we incorporate simple breathing exercises — an ideal way to introduce mindful breathing. In the short term, martial arts and mindfulness help with acute issues of anxiety, fear, and pain. In the long term, these skills become tools throughout life.

How do you introduce meditation to young people and what are its effects?

Guided imagery is an ideal way to introduce children to meditation and is possible with patients as young as three years old. Even in the busy environment of a pediatric day hospital, patients can achieve a deep state of relaxation. Through guided imagery, the child can reclaim a sense of control in an environment where they have little or no control. They can close their eyes and go home.

ABOUT HERBS FEATURE

OF THE MONTH

Turmeric

By Jyothirmai Gubili

Turmeric is a perennial herb with a medicinal history that dates back 5,000 years. It is used in traditional medicine for wound healing and to treat infections and stomach ailments. The powdered rhizome (rootstocks from the turmeric plant) is used as a spice in many cuisines, and as a coloring agent in food and cosmetics.

There are many active substances in turmeric, but curcumin is the most studied. In laboratory studies, it was shown to have anti-inflammatory effects, as well as to protect nerve cells and help prevent or delay the development of cancer. In patients with colorectal cancer, curcumin given during the pre-surgery waiting period improved cachexia (a condition involving rapid loss of weight and muscle) and general health of patients. In other trials, curcumin was shown to be safe when given along with docetaxel and gemcitabine, two commonly used chemotherapy drugs. However, due to poor absorption and rapid metabolism, high doses of curcumin are needed to observe the effects.

Clinical studies indicate that turmeric may help reduce the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome and ulcerative colitis. It was also found to be safe, with effects comparable to a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee. Additional findings suggest benefits of a topical turmeric-based cream in reducing dermatitis (inflammation of the skin) induced by radiotherapy in patients with head and neck cancer. Larger trials are needed to confirm these findings.

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