

MEDICAL RESEARCHERS WEIGH 'ALTERNATIVES' \ HARVARD TO EXPLORE TREATMENT THEORIES

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Acupuncture, massage, and herbal remedies aren't often mentioned in the same breath with Harvard **Medical** School.

But with a \$10 million grant announced yesterday, Harvard and Beth Israel Deaconess **Medical** Center hope to become leaders in a national movement to apply rigorous scientific study to so-called "**alternative**" treatments, which the world of academic medicine has long viewed with skepticism. The gift will create the Harvard **Medical** School-Osher Institute for Research and Education in Complementary and Integrative **Medical** Therapies, with an endowment to support young **researchers** at Harvard-affiliated hospitals. It will also support a research center that Beth Israel launched in 1993 in response to a wave of consumer interest in herbs, chiropractic techniques, relaxation therapy, and other **alternative** treatments.

"What we needed was a collective commitment to guide this trend with science and national thinking and open-minded skepticism," said Dr. David Eisenberg, who founded the Beth Israel center.

In 1997, Americans made around 600 million office visits to providers of **alternative** medicine, spending around \$30 billion, mostly out of pocket, but rarely discussed that treatment with their physicians, Eisenberg said. Meanwhile, consumers have no way of judging herbal remedies' claims of effectiveness and safety.

The grant will build on the work of the Beth Israel center, which is currently studying the effects and cost-effectiveness of treating lower back pain with acupuncture and other **alternative** therapies. Recently, the center has also launched basic science research on the properties of herbs such as ginkgo, which some say improves memory and circulation, but which may also cause dangerous bleeding.

Eisenberg hopes to answer the questions he started asking in 1979, when he was the first US **medical** student to study traditional medicine in Beijing:

"What if these things worked because they worked as opposed to belief or placebo? Which could be transplanted across the Pacific. And what scientific discovery could they lend themselves to?"

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