

# doctorsNS

The official magazine of Doctors Nova Scotia

## MERGING *of* MEDICINES

NS physician combines  
Eastern, Western practices



**NEW MSI WEBSITE**  
Bulletins fully searchable

**PROVINCIAL ELECTION**  
Health-care issues get attention

**MENTAL HEALTH**  
Helping family physicians  
better manage patients



## China trip began career path for NS physician

Section of Integrative and Complementary Medicine approaches 20th anniversary

By CALLY RAVN  
Staff writer

**A** month-long trip to China as a medical student put Dr. J. William LaValley on an entirely different career path than what he envisioned.

"The trip altered my life dramatically," said Dr. LaValley, who has been practising at the Medical Wellness Centre in Chester, NS, since 1988.

"Even with the advanced medical training I was already getting, in China I saw the acupuncture and herbal medicine and realized my medical scientific model was insufficient to account for the phenomenon that was occurring in traditional Chinese medicine," he said.

That pivotal trip provided him the opportunity to study ancient Eastern medical practises in conjunction with his Western medical training.

Three months after returning from China, Dr.

LaValley attended an electro-acupuncture conference. This provided him the next "clinical bridge" to begin to understand common features of electrophysiology and acupuncture. Nova Scotia physician Dr. David Baker also attended the conference where he discussed his use of electro-acupuncture, primarily for relief of patients' pain and chronic inflammation, at his practice in Chester, NS.

Over the years, Dr. LaValley kept in touch with Dr. Baker as he completed his medical degree at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, and his family practice internship in Louisville, Kentucky. As Dr. Baker planned his retirement, he offered Dr. LaValley the opportunity to join his Chester practice, with the possibility of one day continuing it. That's exactly what happened. Over 25 years later, Dr. LaValley continues



to practise in Chester.

Dr. LaValley views his career as a professional journey using evidence-based molecular biology, integrating conventional and complementary medicine into daily practise. His goals are to maximize beneficial outcomes for patients and to share integrative and complementary medicine information through collaboration, communication and cooperation with interested colleagues.

“My practice applies scientific evidence-based concepts and tools of conventional medicine with clinical tools and methods of complementary medicine in a way that effectively and efficiently integrates them together,” he said.

He emphasized his patients receive complementary medical care in addition to their conventional care, not instead of it.

“I think that’s the most important emphasis. Integrative and complementary medicine is in addition to, not instead of conventional medicine,” he said.

### Section renamed

Doctors Nova Scotia’s Section of Complementary Medicine was established in 1994, with Dr. LaValley as chair, a position he still holds. Last year, it was renamed the Section of Integrative and Complementary Medicine to more accurately reflect the medical practises of its members.

“The term integrative is much more appropriate,” said Dr. LaValley, adding that the previous name didn’t acknowledge the inclusive integration of conventional medical practise with complementary medical practise.

As the section approaches its 20th anniversary next year, Dr. LaValley looked back on its beginnings and how much has changed.

“In the late 1980s, many of my patients seeking complementary medicine only wanted the unconventional medicine options

such as homeopathy and electroacupuncture,” he recalled.

“I now primarily see people with advanced chronic diseases including many with cancer who are looking to blend their conventional medical treatments with natural products and other pharmaceutical prescriptions to optimize their immune system,” he said.

### Billing code goal

Compared to when he first opened his practice, Dr. LaValley said there’s a notable increase in the knowledge of integrative and complementary medicine in both patients and physicians.

Integrative and complementary medicine medical services have remained non-insured in Nova Scotia since the founding of the section and thus have no assigned MSI billing codes. Dr. LaValley said a single approved billing code would provide many physicians the clinical service option and incentive to provide a basic integrative and complementary medicine service that would be an MSI-insured medical service.

“A single MSI-insured fee code for a 10 or 15-minute integrative and complementary medicine counselling or treatment session would give physicians the opportunity to talk to their patients about these options,” he said.

Section members are interested in submitting an application for single MSI billing code although the concept is still in the very early stages, according to Dr. LaValley.

### Integrative and complementary treatments

The Medical Wellness Centre primarily uses integrative and complementary medicine to treat patients suffering from chronic illness and pain who often feel they have exhausted conventional treatment options.

“Providing multiple concurrent, compatible treatment options gives

patients relief that is very rewarding,” said Dr. LaValley.

He said the approach encourages patients to take charge of their own health and participate in their treatment decisions. To manage their own disease, patients get additional tools consisting of detailed, multi-faceted treatment plans including daily journals to track food intake, pharmaceutical prescriptions, natural health products and daily activities to best determine how these factors relate to their symptoms.

“The patient becomes attuned to their daily fluctuations and, over time, they are much better able to manage their symptoms and understand what is causing them,” he added.

Knowledge of the molecular biology of conventional and complementary medicines – and how they can work together – allows Dr. LaValley to implement plans which involve a variety of treatments.

“Each medical condition is a sort of puzzle, which I can help solve using a broad spectrum of treatment interventions,” he said.

His treatment plans can include prescriptions for foods, pharmaceuticals, natural health products, referrals for surgery (and frequently to other medical specialists), physical activities including exercise, massage, relaxation therapy, and reading as well as counselling for managing emotional issues.

“Giving an extensive treatment plan to diligently implement for weeks or months provides patients the opportunity to return with feedback about exactly what is working and what is not,” he said.

“They are telling me what clinical recommendations work best for them with their daily journal documentation. We sort through their data and look at what symptoms are better or worse and then develop the next set of recommendations,” he said.

“

I’ve got one foot planted firmly in each professional field – conventional medicine and complementary medicine. I’ve dedicated my life and my career to integrating these practises.

**Dr. J. William LaValley**

*Section of Integrative and Complementary Medicine chair*

Dr. LaValley sees most of his patients between two and four times a year during appointments that last between one-and-a-half to two hours. He emphasized that patients with cancer attend the clinic at more frequent intervals.

“Providing these treatment plans takes time. They aren’t suited for a short clinic visit,” he said.

### Future plans

Dr. LaValley has big dreams for the future of the Section of Integrative and Complementary Medicine.

“Information about molecularly-targeted, evidence-based treatment options in integrative and complementary medicine should be streamlined and made easily accessible for conventional physicians who see patients in large volumes,” he said, “especially for treating chronic conditions where we spend so much of our provincial health care resources.”

“I’ve got one foot planted firmly in each professional field – conventional medicine and complementary medicine. I’ve dedicated my life and my career to integrating these practises,” said Dr. LaValley.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to discuss this among colleagues. Nova Scotia has an important role to play in integrative and complementary medicine,” he added.

# STATistics

Taking the pulse of Nova Scotia's physicians



*J. William LaValley*

**YEARS IN PRACTICE**

25

**HOMETOWN**

Chester, Nova Scotia

**SPECIALTY**

Integrative and  
complementary medicine

**What I wish I knew 20 years ago:**

Intellectually: expertise in multiple computer programming languages. Emotionally: the freedom and healing that comes from choosing healthy thoughts and feelings.

**My favourite place:** Ovens Natural Park at high tide with a southerly wind – an awe-inspiring experience.

**No one knows that I:** Have strong, geeky tendencies in tech, physics and mathematics.

**My favourite book:** No Boundary by Ken Wilber.

**I feel healthy when:** My wife and I are walking in the woods with our dog Lily.

**How I live green:** One-car family, recycle much and often, cyber-commute, cyber meetings.

**Proudest moment in my career:** Is now with my medical practice and professional views featured in *doctorsNS*.

**My favourite flavour of ice cream:** My wife's natural, homemade chocolate ice cream.

**Craziest adventure I've been on:**

As an MD-PhD medical student in an initial USA to China medical exchange education trip in 1982. It was the 'old China' before its massive technical industrialization and openness to the West; observing the ancient acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine profoundly changed my medical, scientific and professional world views.

**If I wasn't a doctor, I would be:** A university professor and research scientist.

**A talent I would most like to have:**

Professional musician; strings or keyboards.

**My childhood dream:** To be an Army doctor or a Navy pilot to fly jets.

**My most treasured possession:** My family.

**My greatest fear:** Not remembering to stay grounded in gratitude and share kindness each day.