Integrating complementary medicine into conventional care varies between countries as do the range of approaches used to improve health outcomes. It is important to learn from each other if we are to reduce the burden of ill health in society, particularly if the costs associated with long term conditions are to be reduced. However, in trying to address ill health, we may be at risk of forgetting the importance of health promoting activities, some of which are based in traditional systems of medicine. Wellbeing however, means different things to different people in different countries and includes satisfaction with life, having a good quality of life, having a balanced lifestyle and perhaps above all being happy.

The Tao, in Chinese philosophy, is the way or process of nature. All things follow this way, which is works to achieve balance and harmony. Pain, sickness and disease result with physiological and biochemical imbalances and our harmony is disrupted. Integrative health care practitioners have as their primary goal helping patients return to a balanced state of health, and maintain a harmonious state of wellbeing.

There are many different approaches used throughout the world used to improve wellbeing, examples include; patient self-management, practitioner-administered treatments and group based community activities. Visiting China on two occasions this year I have been struck by the range of wellbeing activities, in the open air, at one with nature – Taiji, dancing (traditional and western), Kung Fu, Qi gong, singing, playing music, badminton and Tia jian zi, all of which promote wellbeing. Sadly, the reduction in cycling in China is ever more apparent with the growth of car use. This is in contrast to the rapid increase in cycling in the UK and other parts of Europe.

There are a range of self help/selfcare approaches which are available to us to improve our health and wellbeing. Food and nutrition are an integral part of achieving good health. In Haifa, Israel, earlier this year I was struck by the special herbs used in food prepared for people with cancer. What was particularly innovative was the hospital chef teaching patients how to prepare various foods by using herbs which would help to improve and maintain their health.

The use of health giving herbal teas is part of many cultures. It is these various elements which act together or independently to provide better health outcomes. There are many examples from different countries, cultures and communities from which we can learn and benefit. By developing cross cultural understanding and developing research collaborations with different countries we can start to combine the best global health care approaches for ourselves as individuals and for our patients.

This issue includes the development of an innovative organisation which has developed in the UK over the last year, the College of Medicine. Its approach to including a patients’ council and emphasis on self-care, environment and health offer a refreshing opportunity for us to re-examine the importance of public health. Other articles contained in this issue show case different research methodologies (systematic reviews, randomised controlled trials, surveys, a case report and basic science) and feature a range of health issues and treatment approaches which may indicate possibilities for integrative patient care.

I am also pleased to announce the launch of the new website for the Research Council for Complementary Medicine (RCCM), a UK charity which is associated with EuJIM (www.rccm.org.uk). The RCCM established in 1983 promotes good quality research with the key aim to widen patients access to safe and effective therapies. Although based in the UK, we welcome international members to join the research network. Please do join us, there is no cost (although contributions to our running costs are extremely welcome). We hope you find our resources useful and if you would like us to circulate notices of up and coming conferences please let us know.

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