

The Doctor and Masseur Will See You Now

By MARCELLE S. FISCHLER

CALYPSO VARELLA, 28, a teacher from Bayside, Queens, was due for a checkup. Feeling stressed and depressed, she made an appointment with David Edelson, an internist in Manhasset. Ms. Varella figured the doctor would prescribe some kind of medication.

Dr. Edelson, 44, gave Ms. Varella a comprehensive checkup. But instead of writing a prescription for an anti-depressant, he sent Ms. Varella to the other end of his medical suite. There, beyond the full-scale gym, the primary-care physician recommended that she try a Reiki treatment in his day spa.

"I didn't know what to expect," Ms. Varella recalled recently, after having undergone several weeks of Eastern-style treatments that involved having Valerie Onorato, 41, a Reiki master and the spa director, lightly place her hands on Ms. Varella's body to channel energy, relieve emotional distress, soothe sore muscles and reduce pain.

"If the doctor didn't recommend it to me, I would have been more skeptical," Ms. Varella said. "It ended up doing wonders for me."

Medical practices on the Island are changing. Alternative treatments like acupuncture and pampering extras like massage therapy and facials are increasingly blended into traditional health care. Instead of the usual cluster of examining rooms with table and scale, some doctors' offices now include medi-spas that combine conventional medicine with therapeutic spa treatments, gyms and classes or personal instruction in yoga, tai chi and crystal-healing therapy.

"This is a health club for life," Dr. Edelson said of his integrative internal medicine practice.

After 14 years of running a traditional primary-care office, two years ago Dr. Edelson, 44, opened a practice that incorporates alternative therapies, chiropractic care and physical therapy along with high-tech cardiac risk detection and treatment, a sleep disorders center and a diet program.

Dr. Edelson said conventional medicine had de-



Chris Maynard for The New York Times

MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS are combining traditional medicine with alternative treatments like massage and acupuncture. Calypso Varella gets a facial from Valerie Onorato, a Reiki master, at HealthBridge in Manhasset.

generated into a symptom-pill cycle. "There's more to medicine than that," he added. "We are trying to develop a total health package."

In Dr. Edelson's spa, listed recently by Spa magazine as among the top-10 day spas in the country, patients can have hot stone or deep tissues massages, facials, guided meditation and Reiki healing. A personal trainer does 30-minute, one-on-one weight-training sessions in the office's gym and a nutritionist helps patients with a diet program.

"We want to be center point for our people to develop better living habits," Dr. Edelson said. "By focusing our attention on lifestyle issues such as nutrition and fitness and stress reduction, we can really develop a long-term plan for health that tries to avoid

the use of unnecessary medications and unnecessary health care inventions."

Dr. Edelson said that at least 50 percent of the time patients came to him with stress-related illnesses. Because he could only treat symptoms and not get at the root of the problem, he found his traditional practice to be frustrating.

"There is nothing worse than doing a physical on someone and finding high cholesterol," Dr. Edelson said. "They are 40 pounds overweight, they smoke, they are stressed, and just saying to them: 'You have to go to the gym, you have to go on a diet, you have to manage your stress. I'll see you in a year.'"

Dr. Bilha Chesner Fish is a radiologist specializing in

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ing in body imaging. Her offices, Pathways Women's Health and Manhasset Diagnostic Imaging in Manhasset, are set up with sophisticated equipment for procedures like mammography, ultrasonography, bone-density testing and cancer detection. But along with diagnostic procedures, patients can sign up for yoga, Pilates exercise programs, belly-dancing and classes on writing for self-discovery. She also offers free seminars in anxiety management, the transitions of mother-daughter relationships and overcoming perfectionism.

"I realized how important alternative measures were to well-being," Dr. Fish said. "If we can reduce the stress, if it is via yoga or meditation, which helps me in my personal life, we may prevent physical abuse."

Dr. Fish started the wellness program six years ago with a series of educational conferences with different specialists in response to questions women had about hormonal changes and osteoporosis. Then she decided to add bone-strengthening exercises, eventually building to a full schedule of fitness classes on the wellness center's third floor.

"As we expanded to take care of the entire woman, not only physically but mentally, not only educationally but spiritually, we got unbelievable feedback from the community to continue it, to expand," said Dr. Fish, who puts brochures in the waiting room rather than refer patients to the diverse offerings.

At the Alternative Treatment Center in Valley Stream the emphasis is on muscular-skeletal pain management, employing a variety of techniques like physical therapy, chiropractic, acupuncture and massage. Dr. Vincent Jarvis, 43, an internist, is the medical director.

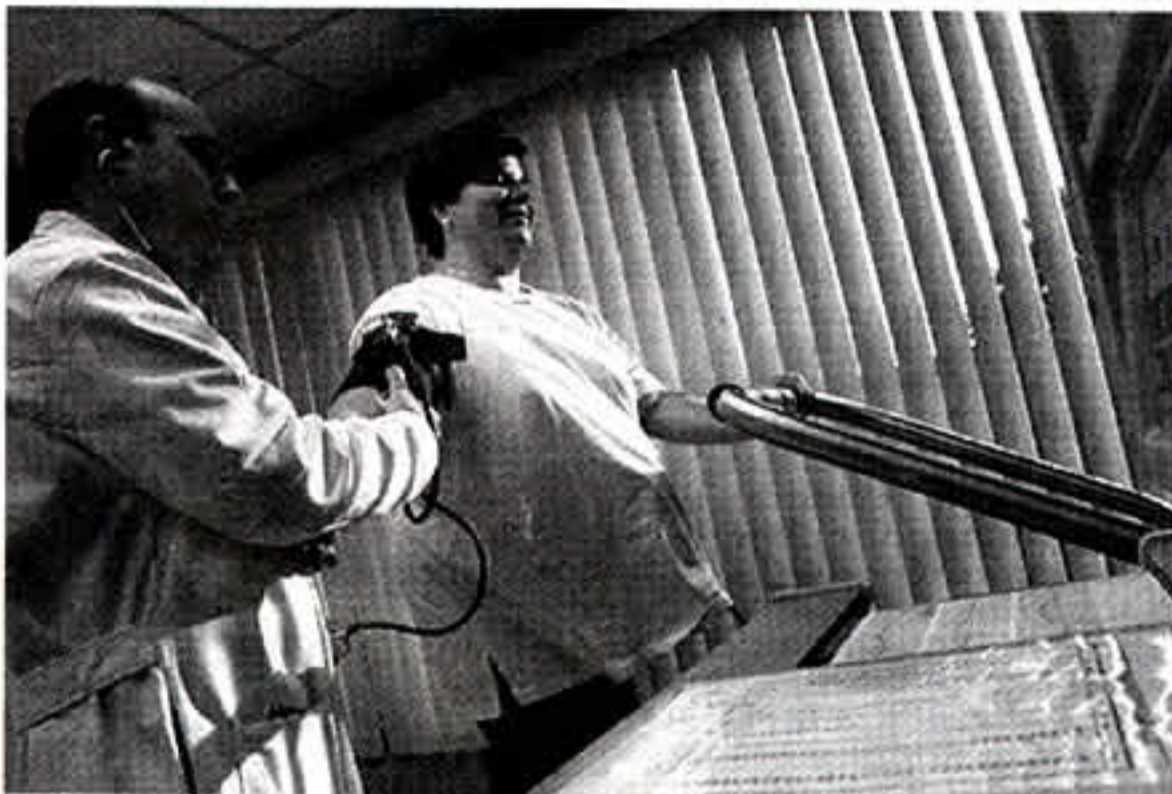
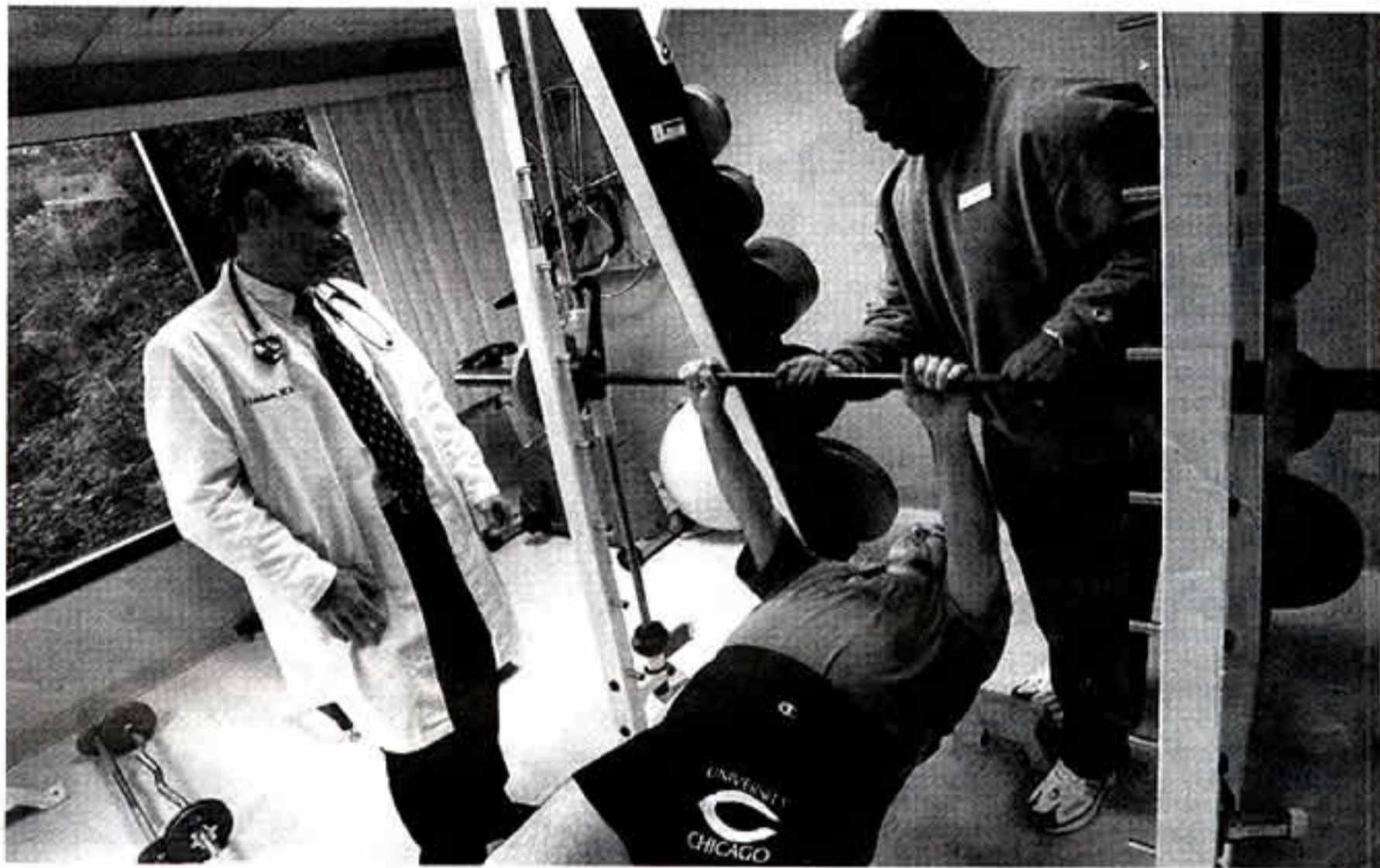
"Sometimes doctors don't have all the answers," Dr. Jarvis said. "It's good to have all of these modalities available."

If Dr. Jarvis finds out that a patient's back is hurting because of being overweight, for instance, he refers the patient to the center's nutritionist. A patient who gets an upset stomach from medication for low back pain may be directed to the center's acupuncturist. While Dr. Jarvis still orders M.R.I.'s and standard diagnostic tests, he said using alternative medicine with traditional pharmaceuticals like anti-inflammatory drugs was like going to the symphony.

"I like to work in concert with my other modalities," Dr. Jarvis said. "I don't like to pit one modality against another and say this is better than that. That defeats the purpose of why you have this comprehensive, integrated practice. We all work well in concert together."

Nancy Stein, 37, a pediatric speech pathologist from New Hyde Park, suffers from chronic and severe migraine headaches. She had been to a neurologist, had cat scans, M.R.I.'s, consulted allergists and taken prescription medications. For five years, nothing seemed to relieve her migraines. She was open to an alternative route.

In April, Ms. Stein came to Dr. Jeffrey Schapiro's Great Neck of-



Photographs by Chris Maynard for The New York Times

fice for a consultation. Dr. Schapiro, an orthopedist and licensed acupuncturist, examined her. Then he referred her to his in-house acupuncturist, Patricia Dodd.

"I haven't had a migraine since," Ms. Stein said happily, though she was lying on a table with four acupuncture needles sticking into her neck and two in the center of her back. Hoping to wean herself off medication, she gets acupuncture once a week and goes to Dr. Schapiro's massage therapist weekly for help releasing muscular tension. She sees the doctor after every six alternative treatments.

"Acupuncture simply works for me, and whatever that means, the quality of my life has improved dramatically," Ms. Stein said.

Dr. Schapiro, 52, specializes in replacing hips and knees and surgery for arthritis. Nine years ago, he added acupuncture to his skills.

"I was giving out a lot of medications to patients that weren't making them better or were making them sick and I had nothing to offer them," Dr. Schapiro said. Of acupuncture, he said: "I found it complements what I do as an orthopedist. Sometimes people respond to one form of treatment when they won't to another."

Last year he added a massage therapist to his staff and opened a physical therapy center with a gym.

Dr. Schapiro said he referred acupuncture and massage for pain management for about 10 percent to 15 percent of his patients.

"It's something I battle with all the time because it doesn't make sense," Dr. Schapiro said of the alternative treatments. "All I can tell you is I see patient after patient respond to acupuncture when nothing else worked."

Adding alternative and complementary treatments and gym facilities to a medical practice is more than a matter of providing comprehensive care. With doctors' income declining due to managed care, both Dr. Schapiro and Dr. Edelson admitted it was also a painless way to generate income.

"These other things are also revenue producing and are part of staying in business," Dr. Schapiro said. "It was also a business decision."

Dr. Edelson said that the average physical identifies problems nicely but doesn't do anything to directly intervene. With his new setup, patients can find out what's wrong and take care of it under one roof.

"The gym not only is one of the best ways to lose weight, improve your cardiac function, decrease your cholesterol, prevent heart disease, but it also one of the best stress managers that you can find," Dr. Edelson said. The spa, he said, prevented stress and reduced the need for a lot of interventions and

At HealthBridge in Manhasset, Dr. David Edelson, above, oversees his patient, Steven Hertzberg, who wants to lose weight, during a workout with George Adams, the head personal trainer. Also at HealthBridge, Dr. William Klein monitors a patient, Anna Cicio, on the treadmill in the stress test room.

medication. Beauty treatments, like facials, can be uplifting.

"If you don't like the way you look, you are not going to be happy," Dr. Edelson said. "We are not just looking at internal health. We are saying external beauty is important too."

For those for whom a facial isn't uplifting enough, Dr. Edelson refers patients to Dr. Burt Greenberg, 47, a plastic surgeon with a multi-specialty practice and a hospital-rated ambulatory surgery office in Great Neck that also includes more than the usual nip and tuck. For those who don't want to reapply their eyeliner or lip liner every day, Dr. Greenberg's aesthetician does permanent makeup as well as microdermabrasion. His massage therapist helps the swelling go down faster after liposuction; a psychotherapist helps patients assess their motivation and be realistic about the coming change in their looks.

The pampering path to better health is also spreading to the dental office. A reflexologist rubs the hands and feet of patients getting \$10,000 to \$45,000 veneers and mouth reconstructions in a candlelit room at Dr. Ira Koepfel's East Setauket cosmetic dentistry office. The scent of baking bread provides aromatherapy; paraffin hand wax treatments and virtual reality glasses for watching movies while he works on their teeth are also available.

"I wanted a place that people could look forward to in their daily routine," said Dr. Koepfel, 44. He started adding spa perks seven months ago, he said, "so that on a Wednesday they are not dreading going to a dentist, they are saying, 'Thank God I am going to the dentist.'"