

understanding ayurveda

THE PATH TO BETTER HEALTH IS PAVED WITH STONES FROM BOTH SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT—EASTERN AND WESTERN. ONE DOCTOR EXPLAINS...

BY STEPHANIE FORTE

"Las Vegas is a very spiritual place, and I'm being called there," is what Dr. William Celentano told friends when he left California for Las Vegas in 1997. Celentano, 52, a primary care physician with University Medical Center (UMC), often describes Las Vegas as a "great spiritual center." And once people stop laughing, Celentano lets them in on his secret. He's discovered a different side of Sin City – one that provides an opportunity to blend the ancient practice of Ayurvedic medicine with traditional Western medicine, to promote better health.

While Western medicine leans toward treating symptoms and disease through drugs and surgery, Ayurveda's focus is the balance of one's energy. Western doctors, such as Celentano, see that combining the research and technology of Western medicine with the philosophy and practices of Ayurveda will provide a better state of health. Though surgery and herbal remedies are used in Ayurveda, its main premise is to ensure balance within the body, which means one's immune system will be strong and able to fight disease.

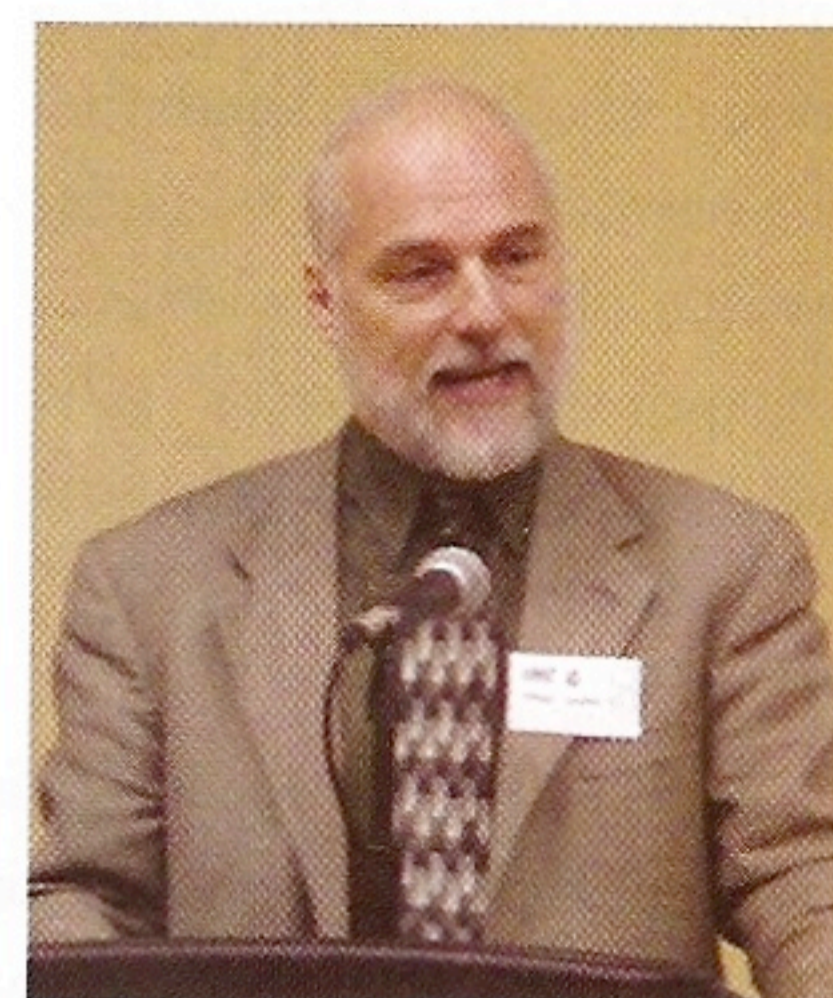
Originated in India over 5,000 years ago, Ayurveda translates as the "Science of Life." For thousands of centuries, Ayurvedic teachings were passed through the generations – its written texts are believed to have been composed between 4000 and 6000 B.C. Today, Ayurveda is still referred to as the "Mother of All Healing." Its goals are simple: to heal the sick and ensure the healthy remain healthy. Much like the philosophy of Yoga, this is achieved by enabling people to understand how to create balance in their body, mind and lives and to reach an optimal state of health.

The balancing process begins by examining the balance in the body of five natural elements: space, air, fire, water and earth. These elements are represented as biological forces known as *doshas*: *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha* – each a different combination of the five elements. According to Ayurveda, each of us comes into the world with our own unique combination of the three *doshas*, our individual constitution. As unique as our fingerprints, this is a combination of our physical, mental and emotional characteristics.

When our constitution is in a balance state, we experience health. When internal or external forces (diet or lifestyle choices) upset the balance, disease and sickness invades the body and mind. Ayurveda helps individuals to understand their constitutional make-up and what's necessary to remain in balance or to correct any imbalances.

"One of the keys to developing a stronger state of health is to be aware of what your particular formula is, and to endeavor to maintain and balance that," says Dr. Celentano. "This can be done in respect to our lifestyle, diet and exercise choices."

To determine a patient's constitution, Ayurvedic doctors will evaluate an individual in much the same way that a Western doctor evaluates his or her patients: through discussion, completing written evaluations and observation of the patient's movement and other physical characteristics.



Dr. William Celentano



Once their constitution is determined, doctors can help an individual to adjust their lifestyle and diet to achieve a more balanced state.

THE DOSHAS

Vata is a combination of the air and space elements. It relates to the body's functions linked with movement; for example muscle movement, respiration, circulation, blinking and thought. When *vata* is balanced in the body, it provides creativity and flexibility. When it's out of balance, it releases fear and anxiety.

A person with a *vata* dominant constitution who exposes themselves to excessive *vata* qualities will throw their body out of balance. For example, since some of the *vata* qualities are cold and mobile, too much travel or exposure to cold weather can cause an imbalance. A few ways to keep *vata* in balance or to adjust an imbalance would be to stay warm, get plenty of rest and adapt regular routines.

Pitta is the combination of the fire and water elements. It relates to the body's metabolic system: digestion, absorption, nutrition, metabolism and body temperature. In a balanced state, *pitta* produces courage, ambition, understanding and intelligence. To keep *pitta* in balance one should avoid excessive heat, oil, non-spicy foods and limit salt intake.

Someone with a *pitta* dominant constitution will have a healthy appetite and will be tempted to indulge in spicy foods. However, too much of a good thing causes an imbalance, which provokes anger, hatred and jealousy.

Kapha is the energy of lubrication, and it's made up of the elements of water and earth. It relates to the body's structure—bones, muscle and tendons. Those with *kapha* dominant constitutions are typically forgiving, calm and tolerant. When they become out of balance, their tendencies will lean towards greed, jealousy and possessiveness.

Those dominant in *kapha* have traits such as a large frame, are heav-

ier in weight and have thick, oily hair. They should avoid dairy, heavy, fatty or oily foods and iced drinks. To help maintain their balance, *kaphas*, who are advised to vary their routines, should stay active and get plenty of exercise.

ARURVEGAS

In 1998, Dr. Celentano attended a conference where Dr. Vasant Lad, originally from India and the founder of the Ayurvedic Institute in New Mexico, was lecturing on the Ayurvedic approach to cancer and chronic diseases. At the end of the conference he thought, "Now I know why I went to medical school," he says, "Ayurveda is logical, it makes sense."

Celentano is now the driving force behind the Las Vegas Institute of Ayurveda (LVIA). A not-for-profit founded to provide an educational resource for Las Vegas residents and visitors on Ayurvedic medicine, LVIA is dedicated to strengthening the bridge of understanding between Western and Ayurvedic healthcare. In March, LVIA joined UMC to sponsor the first annual AyurVegas symposium, where the most prominent names in the fields of holistic healthcare and research from India and the United States addressed attendees on various aspects of Ayurvedic healthcare. A board member of the National Ayurvedic Medical Association (NAMA), Celentano also helped to bring NAMA's annual conference to Las Vegas in 2005.

"I do believe there is a lot of spiritual energy here," says Celentano. His goals, along with LVIA, are to remain committed to helping others through increased awareness of Ayurveda and recognizing their constitutions. "Who you are is a wonderful, incredible and sacred thing. When you're working within the context of who you really are, then magic happens." And that magic is good health and healthy living. *lvim*

