

UW Health: Endowment allows expansion of integrative health program

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MADISON, Wis. – A \$5.5 million award from the Bernard Osher Foundation will allow UW Health and the UW School of Medicine and Public Health to bring integrative health to a broader swath of the community.

Integrative health is an approach to healthcare focused on all aspects of a person's life that influence their wellness and makes use of a wide variety of tools to manage symptoms and foster health. This is a shift from disease-centered care, called pathogenesis, to health-centered care, called salutogenesis.

While integrative health doesn't exclude pharmaceutical medications or surgeries when they are appropriate, interventions may also include things like massage, working on healthy personal relationships, nutrition, mindfulness, meditation, acupuncture and many others, according to Dr. Greta Kuphal, medical director for the UW Integrative Health program at UW Health, and clinical associate professor of family medicine and community health at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

"It's about supporting the health and wellness of the whole person, not just treating a disease," she said, "Integrative health honors what matters most to you and your reasons for wanting to be healthy."

A vital aspect of this award, given as an endowment to the UW Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, will allow the program to expand access to integrative health to people who don't traditionally access these services, Kuphal said.

“Everyone deserves to be healthy, and we want to learn from different parts of our community how we can best be of service to improve the health and wellness of all our patients with this model of care,” she said. “This funding will allow us to start those conversations and provide services in a way that is informed by what we learn from the community itself.”

In addition to the financial support from the Bernard Osher Foundation, which provides post-secondary scholarships and funding to colleges and universities across the nation, this award brings the UW Integrative Health program into a collective of prestigious, academic integrative health centers across the country, called the Osher Collaborative for Integrative Health.

The collaborative is comprised of eight universities in the United States and one in Stockholm, Sweden. UW–Madison and the University of Cincinnati were added in late 2021.

The collaborative allows the partner institutions to work together on clinical, educational and research endeavors to advance the mission of integrative health, according to Kuphal.

The UW School of Medicine and Public Health’s integrative health program – one of the first in the country – has grown to be one of the largest of its kind in the U.S. It was started in 2001 by Dr. David Rakel, a national leader in integrative health, who is now the chair of the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the school.

The endowment and inclusion in the Osher Collaborative will help drive the expansion of salutogenic science and further the mission of integrative health in the locally, nationally and internationally, Kuphal said.

“We’re excited to share our successes and knowledge with our academic partners and learn from both them and our community,” she said. “This bidirectional learning will strengthen our ability to support the health of all.”s

A pre-recorded interview with Kuphal is available.