Healthcare students and professionals from across the nation filled the halls of the Neuroscience Research Building (NRB) Auditorium at the University of California, Los Angeles for two days on October 22 and 23, 2011. Convening for the first ever, annual National Student Conference on Integrative Medicine (NSCIM), almost everyone present shared great hope for the potential to alleviate some of the problems with the current practice of mainstream medicine. In a survey following the conference, one attendee writes, “overall interest and curiosity about integrative medicine [were] greatly expanded.”

The first day of the conference focused on lecture-style presentations and discussion panels in order to provide a concise overview of integrative medicine and themed topics. “The lectures were engaging,” reports one attendee. “[The] panel was excellent!” says another, adding, “They were very informative and interactive.” With the opening remarks of Dr. Ka-Kit Hui, MD, FACP—advisor of the student planned conference—the importance of true integration of Eastern and Western medical traditions became evident. Dr. Hui emphasized the benefits of care provided by practitioners fluent in both medical approaches. Additionally, various professors from UCLA and other medical centers from across the nation also presented some of the latest evidence-based approaches in integrative oncology and in dealing with stress and inflammation, providing concrete illustrations of the role that
integrative medicine can play in improving patients' lives. The underlying message of these discussions was the importance of moving beyond customary Western methods to examine the treatment approaches of Eastern medicine and to move closer toward complete integration. We must recognize the advantages and limitations of each system and how medicine is strengthened when both are practiced in harmony.

The second day of this landmark conference was a series of experiential sessions. After starting the day off with Tai Chi, the students then attended several informative workshops. The day of workshops featured a section on the scientific bases of integrative practice as well as demonstrations through which the attendees could taste various dishes prepared based on integrative nutrition and move with drumbeat to feel the healing power of music. Among the mix of activities, participants were also able to directly experience acupuncture and acupressure, mindful meditation, and Reiki energy healing.

The closing event was a mentorship luncheon in which students from all professions of health care were encouraged to network with and identify their potential mentors by gathering around one of five panels of faculty mentors for informal conversation over lunch.

In addition to the rich array of conference programs, the NSCIM also marked a milestone in that it also featured the inaugural lecture of the Shirley Hui Memorial Lecture Series. Mrs. Hui played an integral role in the launch and development of the UCLA Center for East-West Medicine (CEWM) and was her husband Dr. Hui’s key pillar of support. Yet, even after her passing due to extensive metastatic breast cancer, her spirit still lives on through the continued progress made in integrative medicine. Professor David Eisenberg from Harvard was invited as the speaker and his inspirational speech won a standing ovation from the audience.

The Conference also featured a report by Tony Hung, UCLA Class of 2013 MD and MBA Candidate and Chief Executive Coordinator of the NSCIM, as the first Shirley Hui Memorial Scholar. The scholarship was made possible by the Shirley Hui Memorial Fund to provide highly motivated students like Tony with the opportunity to travel to China to study East-West medicine and work on collaborative projects. In his words, it was an experience which “defined my monumental first step to grow as an aspiring global leader of healthcare.” In China, Tony learned about the East-West approach to Hepatitis B and also shared his own insights on the topic from a medical student’s perspective.
Even though the duration of the NSCIM only allowed for an overview of integrative medicine as well as a brief introduction to certain themed topics, a general feeling of transformation and personal growth reverberated from the students at the conclusion of the event. In the post-conference survey, many participants pointed out that the NSCIM conference had changed their outlook on health and medicine. Eight medical students from across the country who attended were sponsored by conference grants made possible through the Shirley Hui Memorial Fund. One of them, Grace Shih from the University of Connecticut, wrote to the CEWM that, “it was great hearing about what opportunities there are for us…and where we can apply this knowledge in our future practices.” While the conference had to come to an end, for Grace and many other attendees, it was just the beginning of (or the continuation of) many challenging but exciting journeys. A new generation of leaders in medicine and healthcare lies ahead.

This project is a joint effort between the UCLA Center for East-West Medicine (CEWM) and the UCLA Integrative Medicine Student Interest Group (IMSIG) along with the support of student representatives of the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine. A select number of undergraduate representatives and high school scholars also participated.

To make a contribution to the Shirley Hui Memorial Fund, or to inquire about the Shirley Hui Scholar Program, please contact the Center for East-West Medicine at: 310-794-0712 or cewm@mednet.ucla.edu.