"Take two healing herbs and call me in the morning" may be your next prescription if you see a professional at the Susan Samueli Center of Integrative Medicine, part of the UC Irvine School of Medicine [sscim.uci.edu]. The brand-new 7,000-square-foot facility in Costa Mesa, which opened in late July, offers a wide range of services, from acupuncture, herbal medicine and massage to chiropractic care, nutrition education and lifestyle counseling.

And business is booming, according to Dr. Wadi Najm, director of the center and the associate dean of academic affairs at the UC Irvine School of Medicine. Najm is board certified in geriatric and family medicine, and is deeply committed to integrative approaches that use all available resources to optimize care and prevent illness.

"About half of our patients find us on the Internet, while the other half are referred by physicians, other patients or colleagues who are familiar..."
with the center,” he says.

People who seek out the center desire an integrative approach to their health. So it’s not just about, say, treating high blood pressure but more about looking at the whole person and finding ways to take better care of themselves, Najm says.

Another part of the practice involves dealing with people who have chronic syndromes, such as ongoing pain or gastrointestinal issues.

“These patients are often frustrated because traditional doctors only view [their condition] from one perspective, versus a lifestyle-modification, whole-body approach,” Najm says.

Although people are more accepting of integrative medicine than they were 10 years ago, skeptics still abound.

“New research and multiple studies show the benefits of practices such as acupuncture and pain relief, so more people are starting to understand it,” Najm says. “Medical students and new doctors in particular understand the value of what we do.”

Research done at UC Irvine has shown that an eight-week program of weekly acupuncture sessions lowered blood pressure in those with hypertension; the readings remained normal for four weeks after the treatments ended.

“We’re currently trying to find out how much acupuncture a person needs to keep blood pressure in a desirable range,” Najm says.

The clinic uses therapies shown to be effective by scientific studies, although Najm also recognizes the value of Western medicine. “Applying both of them [Western and less conventional medicine] is more beneficial than one or the other. Complementary treatments often enable a person to require less medication to achieve the same results.”

In addition to individual treatments, the Samueli Center also offers classes to the public. It currently holds Lunch and Learn classes, which focus on particular subjects such as stress reduction. Yoga classes will soon be offered for a small per-class charge of $15 to $20. Go to sscim.uci.edu for updates as information and other classes become available.

U.S. News & World Report rated the UC Irvine School of Medicine one of the top 50 medical schools in the country.