



# INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE BEST PRACTICES

*Continuum Center  
for Health and Healing:  
A Clinical Center Model Study*

Integrative medicine is changing the way medicine is practiced in America. However, no two integrative medicine clinics or programs are identical. While many share patient populations, philosophies of care and treatment protocols, clinics and programs across the US utilize different approaches and economics, and often offer different services aimed at market segments unique to their locale and mission.

The Bravewell Best Practices project documents and disseminates the many ways that integrative medicine is emerging within our health care system. All Best Practices presented are evidenced-based and have been vetted by a committee of experts.

Released in 2007, *Best Practices in Integrative Medicine: A Report from the Bravewell Clinical Network* outlined the best practices of seven leading integrative medicine clinics in the US. From core business models to strategies for growth to key services provided and effective marketing programs, *Best Practices in Integrative Medicine* presented how each of these clinics have achieved growing success within their own unique marketplace and corporate structure.

In this special Bravewell Best Practices Report, Bravewell presents a portion of the *Best Practices in Integrative Medicine: A Report from the Bravewell Clinical Network* for a focused examination of each of the highlighted clinical centers. All seven clinical center model studies can be downloaded at [www.bravewell.org](http://www.bravewell.org).

Starting in 2010, Bravewell began updating the Best Practices report. Current Best Practices information can be found at [www.bravewell.org](http://www.bravewell.org).

## THE CONTINUUM CENTER FOR HEALTH AND HEALING

Beth Israel Hospital, New York, New York

[www.healthandhealingny.org](http://www.healthandhealingny.org)

245 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10016

646-935-2259 for acupuncture, OB-GYN, psychotherapy

646-935-2265 for chiropractic, internal medicine, mind-body practices, otolaryngology

646-935-2257 for family practice, nutrition

646-2255 for ortho and rehabilitation medicine

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The Continuum Center for Health and Healing was founded in 2000 as part of the Beth Israel Medical Center.

Beth Israel Medical Center is a full-service tertiary teaching hospital that was founded on Manhattan's Lower East Side before the turn of the 20th century in affiliation with the Albert Einstein School of Medicine in New York, New York. The Center is part of Continuum Health Partners, a nonprofit hospital system in New York City that is comprised of five hospitals: Beth Israel Medical Center, Roosevelt Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, Long Island College Hospital and The New York Eye and Ear Infirmary.

Conceived by Woodson Merrell, MD, Executive Director of the Continuum Center for Health and Healing, the Center was originally envisioned as a facility that would offer conventional medical care and a wide array of complementary modalities using the integrative medicine approach. The goal was to create a viable model for humanistic and holistic patient-centered care with a focus on prevention and wellness. Today, the Continuum Center for Health and Healing is one of the largest, most comprehensive integrative medicine centers in the country.

### **BUSINESS MODEL**

Although the Continuum Center for Health and Healing is mainly organized as a primary and specialty care facility, it has established a new kind of group practice in which conventional physicians (many of them trained in complementary therapies) and senior holistic practitioners work together in collaboration and community. The Center is committed to integrative and holistic health, and providers treat the person, not simply the disease. With detailed questionnaires and extensive one-on-one interaction, the physicians discern the patients' values, beliefs and philosophic orientation towards health and life, and then work in partnership with them to design programs that incorporate the best wisdom from a wide and diverse base of healing modalities.

While whole family care for adults and children remains the foundation of the Center, specialty practices often generate more revenue and have a more easily accessible patient base. Recently, the Continuum Center for Health and Healing has added four specialty practices — OB/GYN, otolaryngology, physical therapy and physiatry (sports medicine). The Center has also added a Pre- and Post-Surgery Program. This expanded business model is improving the Center's fiscal solvency.

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing accepts many insurance plans. However, the three senior physicians (Drs. Merrell, Kligler and Lee), who are all well established in their practice, are predominately fee-for-service providers. As the reimbursements by insurance companies decrease, this balance of insurance and fee-for-service enables the Center to improve its revenue per visit ratios and thus improve the overall financial picture of the Center.

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing has both full-time and part-time providers. Providers are predominately compensated based on a percentage of their recovered fees, with most receiving 50%. Providers who also have administrative responsibilities receive an additional stipend.

There is no pharmacy on site, although the business plan does call for the Center to begin selling vitamins and supplements in the near future.

Integrative primary care is the Center's most profitable service, but it should be noted that most of these patients are seen on a fee-for-service basis and in the care of one of the senior practitioners.

## **CLINICAL MODEL**

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing specializes in primary care for adults and children (family medicine/internal medicine/gynecology) with specialties in sports medicine, physical therapy, internal medicine and otolaryngology. A wide variety of complementary modalities are also offered. The promise to the Center's clientele is that while in the care of the Continuum Center's providers, patients will be able to:

- Educate themselves about new options in healthcare;
- Redefine their health priorities to promote wellness and prevention;
- Learn about positive lifestyle changes;
- Expand their relationships with healthcare providers in a collaborative dialogue; and
- Explore and expand their understanding of healing and curing.

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing, in conjunction with the Division of Orthopedic & Sports Rehabilitation at Beth Israel Medical Center, recently opened a new, state-of-the-art physical therapy/physical fitness training center — *Focus on Fitness*. This new center is located in the same building as the Center. Through an integrative approach, the program offers both

injury rehabilitation and fitness training programs. Patients receive exercise counseling, nutritional guidance and mind-body modalities to maximize their potential.

Access to care is not physician driven, and patients may see holistic providers such as acupuncturists and chiropractors on a self referred basis while still retaining primary care specialists outside of the Center. However, many patients prefer to have primary care at the Center along with the use of the Center’s other allied health/holistic providers. Case conferences, a part of the Continuing Medical Education Program in Integrative Medicine, involve the holistic practitioners from the Center and community as faculty of this program. Clinicians are invited to present cases at these teaching conferences.

Table 1 below outlines what services are available on-site and what types of practitioners deliver that care.

**TABLE 1**

*Services and provider types at the Continuum Center for Health and Healing*

SERVICE	PROVIDER
Acupuncture/Asian Medicine	Acupuncturist (LAc) Medical Acupuncturist (MD)
Acupressure/Shiatsu	Certified Shiatsu Therapist Acupuncturist (LAc)
Aromatherapy	Nurse (RN)
Botanical/Herbal Medicine	Physician (MD)
Chiropractic	Chiropractor (DC)
Craniosacral Therapy	Chiropractor (DC)
Energy Medicine/Reiki and Healing Touch	Nurse (RN)
Exercise	Physical Therapist (PT)
Focus on Fitness	Physician (DO) Physical Therapist (PT)

Homeopathy	Physician (MD)
IM Consultations	Physician (MD)
Meditation	Physician (MD) Psychologist/Zen Roshi
Men's Health	Physician (MD)
Mind-Body Medicine	Physician (MD) Nurse (RN)
Music Therapy	Psychologist (PhD)
Nutrition	Nutritionist (RD)
OB/GYN	Physician (MD)
Otolaryngology	Physician (MD)
Osteopathy	Physician (DO)
Physical Therapy	Physician (MD)
Pre- and Post-Surgery Program	Physician (MD)
Primary Care — Adults	Physician (MD)
Primary Care — Pediatrics	Physician (MD)
Sports Medicine	Physician (MD)
Women's Health	Physician (MD)

## **PATIENT VOLUME**

Physicians and other holistic allied healthcare providers at The Continuum Center for Health and Healing have averaged 30,000 visits per year for the last five years. Among the various providers, approximately 2,600 patients per month are seen.

Patients come largely through word of mouth (35%), referrals from other providers and insurance companies in the community (18%) and Web site advertising (6%). The Center's physicians are a large source of the integrative referrals within the Center itself. Some patient referrals come from the Beth Israel Medical Center, but this source needs to be developed.

Word of mouth has been served, in part, by the Center's research and community outreach programs.

## **LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING**

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing is led by Executive Director, Woodson Merrell, MD, who, in addition to his patient load, is very active with fundraising and public relations. Merrell interfaces with the philanthropists who support the Center and with leaders at Beth Israel Medical Center and within the greater Continuum system.

Roberta Lee, MD, serves as the Medical Director and oversees all clinical programs at the Continuum Center for Health and Healing. Ben Kligler, MD, is the Research Director. Shoshana Silverman is the Coordinator of Community Education and Outreach and Helen K. Volonakis, MPA, is the Administrator. These four people work closely with the Executive Director to ensure the Center's success.

The Administrative Director oversees the support staff who handles billing and reimbursement, IT, Web site, appointments, medical records, phone triage, public relations and marketing and information coordination.

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing also has a large advisory board comprised of key individuals in the community and leaders in the field of integrative medicine. This board has served the Center well by providing expert advice and networking opportunities.

## **LOCATION AND PREMISES**

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing is located at 245 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10016. Focus on Fitness is located on the first floor of this same building. The building is at the lower end of midtown Manhattan, making it accessible from both lower and midtown Manhattan.

The space, which was designed by a leading architectural firm specializing in both hospital and green design in partnership with a noted *Feng Shui* master, is both comfortable and appealing.

In addition, a keen environmental awareness — from both conservation and safety perspectives — is reflected in the choice of building materials.

## **PHILANTHROPY**

Philanthropy is directed through the joint efforts of its Executive Director, Woodson Merrell, and its founding Board of Trustees mentor, William Sarnoff, with the Center's Fundraising Board and Development Office at Beth Israel Medical Center. The majority of the philanthropic funding has been through the private donations of individuals.

## **GROWTH STRATEGIES**

While busy, the Continuum Center for Health and Healing is not yet profitable and is working on a two-year plan to reach sustainability. Because of the high costs of overhead, standard growth strategies such as increasing the revenue per visit or increasing visits alone will not bring in enough additional revenue. Restructuring and some downsizing/consolidation have been required to bring revenue in line with expenses.

Recent growth strategies have included:

- Consolidating staff and provider positions where possible;
- Securing restricted grants to fund non-essential or support services;
- Eliminating those integrative modalities that are currently operating at a loss, such as massage. Physicians now refer to therapists in the community rather than have Center staff deliver these services;
- Increasing those integrative modalities that are operating at a profit;
- Adding specialty physicians who can bring in patients and refer them to the integrative practitioners (sports medicine, physical therapy); and
- Increasing the number of diagnostic procedural tools providers offer (skin tag removal, pulmonary function tests and EKGs).

Future growth strategies include:

- Development of a dietary supplement line for retail service to patients; and
- Development of a Women's Holistic Health Program.

## **MOST SUCCESSFUL ACTIONS**

The Continuum Center for Health and Healing's most successful actions to date include:

- Addition of physiatry and physical therapy;
- Efficient staffing of providers; and
- Simplification of insurance plans based on favorable reimbursement.