

Alternative health

For students wanting to study in the field of alternative health, Canadian institutions have an international appeal.

The field of alternative health is a particularly wide one, covering such diverse subjects as massage, naturopathic medicine, reflexology, iridology, acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine. A recent surge in demand for alternative health therapies worldwide means that Canadian institutions offering courses in this field have seen growing numbers of international students in recent years.

'We are quite popular with America, European countries and Japan,' says Pauline Wolf, from the Windsong School of Healing in British Columbia, which offers courses in a variety of alternative health subjects including iridology, auriculotherapy and holistic health. 'Probably because alternative skills are well recognised and have been well used in these countries for many years,' she ventures.

Bobbi Greenberg, from the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Ontario, reports that international student numbers at the college are growing every year, and students come from as far afield as Barbados, Scotland, Japan and Spain. 'We are receiving more enquiries from the USA as we are conducting additional recruitment trips in the USA,' she says. 'Our dollar is also very attractive to US students.'

Canadian institutions offering alternative health courses also benefit from a growing reputation in this field. 'Many people feel that British Columbia is the epicentre of a renaissance of hands-on health therapy,' says Irish Webb, from the West Coast College of Massage Therapy. 'Because our current 3,000-hour training programme is unique in the world - the longest and most comprehensive - we feel it would be of interest to foreign students who want to get the best training available.'

The West Coast College of Massage Therapy currently offers a three-year diploma programme, but is developing a fourth year which will lead to a Bachelor of Science degree. 'Our course is accredited provincially, recognised nationally

and students travelling internationally may have to go through a licensing exam but usually have the skills and education far exceeding other international requirements,' says Webb.

Depending on their academic background and future plans, students wanting to study in the field of alternative health in Canada are faced with an array of options, varying from part-time diploma courses lasting a few months to Bachelor degree courses lasting up to four years. However, as Chris Shirley, from the Pacific Institute of Reflexology in Vancouver, points out, ensuring the quality and content of courses within this extensive field can be difficult. 'Reflexology is not a government-recognised field in most countries,

including Canada,' he says. 'Hence, there are no set standards for professional practice or instruction. Each school has its own curriculum and requirements for a certificate.'

The absence of country-specific regulations does mean, however, that students find it easy to transfer their skills to other countries. As Wolf explains, 'Qualified graduates are able to work around the world since alternative health is not specific to any one country and few countries have regulations about holistic practitioners other than having certification in their field in order to obtain business licences.'

Close affiliation with professional associations and groups in the field of alternative health also gives institutions in Canada a competitive edge. The four year full-time training programme offered by the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine is accredited by the Council for Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME). 'Our programme is excellent,' says Greenberg. 'Accreditation by the CNME means that the mission and objectives of the college are soundly conceived and that its educational programme has been designed to meet the standards of the council.'



Selection of institutions that provide alternative health courses in Canada

	Location	No. of students	% of studs
Academy of Classical Oriental Sciences	BC	70	17
Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine	ON	547	3
Dominion Herbal College	BC	49	14
Kutenai Art Therapy Institute	BC	12	17
Pacific Institute of Reflexology	BC	14	10
Toronto School of Homeopathic Medicine	ON	80	1
West Coast College of Massage Therapy	BC	200	5
Windsong School of Healing	BC	14	20

Definitions

Naturopathic medicine is an approach to medicine which works with the body's own self-correcting mechanisms. It works on the principle that health can only be achieved by balancing each individual's structural, biochemical and mental/emotional elements.

Practitioners of **iridology** study a patient's iris in order to decipher their inherited and acquired tendencies towards health and disease, their current state of health in general and the state of every organ in particular. Every organ and part of the body is represented in a specific part of the iris and various marks, signs and discolourations provide the practitioner with important information about the health of a patient.

Reflexology is the applying of pressure to feet or hands in order to treat symptoms in different areas of the body. Reflex areas on the feet and hands form a map of the body with the right foot corresponding to the right side of the body and the left foot corresponding to the left side of the body.

Chinese medicine is an ancient healing system that has been practised and developed in Asia for over 2,000 years. It includes acupuncture, herbal medicine, massage and manipulation, breathing and movement exercises, as well as dietary advice.

The process of **auriculotherapy** stimulates the auricle of the outer ear in order to treat symptoms in different parts of the body. Stimulation techniques involve the use of either acupuncture needles, an electric pulse or finger pressure.