

BALANCING
LIFE



East meets West to improve clients' health BY COLLEEN DIXON

In the field of dietetics, some consider Anu Kaur ('99M) a pioneer because of the unique blend of Eastern and Western philosophies that she uses to improve clients' health and wellness. The trail she is blazing is certainly part of the reason the American Dietetic Association named Kaur the 2009 Emerging Dietetic Leader for Virginia. The award honors members who show great promise early in their careers for moving the dietetics profession, and the association, forward.

In 2004 Kaur started a nutrition consulting company, A Nu Healthy You. Beyond her desire for a flexible schedule, Kaur wanted to "work on projects I was passionate about, which would allow for a variety of experiences," she says.

Clients from all over the United States have benefited from Kaur's expertise. E-mail, phone and face-to-face consultations are tools she uses to educate clients and the public about wellness and nutrition. Speaking engagements in the greater Washington, D.C., area are another avenue of sharing information.

A variety of reasons prompt clients to seek Kaur's assistance: "Some of my clients just want to lose weight. Some want to eat healthier and want the guidance and support of a registered dietitian and certified wellness coach. Many of them have been diagnosed with a health issue or medical condition, like heart disease, diabetes, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome or cancer."

Changing lifelong habits, even in the face of disease or illness, is not something most people willingly tackle. Kaur makes breaking habits fun. She has clients create a "vision board," a visual collage that represents what wellness and vitality mean to them individually. "Many clients have expressed that it has opened them up to new ways of doing things and creating new habits at a deeper level because they have tapped into their own personal motivation."

Another innovative take on dietetics is Kaur's "Tea Time with the Dietician" events, which she conducts at clients' homes. "This is a very enjoyable personal means for clients to hear about the latest in nutrition science and tips to apply in their own lives."

Kaur's "whole-person" concept of health and wellness merges Western science and Eastern holistic philosophy. "I make sure to take the whole person into account — mind, body and spirit," she says. "I share nutrition information and provide appropriate guidance in diet as needed, and I help people set realistic goals that they can achieve. If someone is interested, we discuss complementary Eastern modalities such as yoga or mindful breathing and other options to help individuals manage stress and, in many cases, enhance their nutrition counseling experience."

Kaur is careful to ensure that complementary therapies that clients are practicing or interested in will not inadvertently sabotage their goal of being healthy. "For example, if someone wants to take herbal supplements, I look at the quantity they are taking and also assess if there are any herbal-medication interactions, to make sure no harm occurs. My goal is to help people be successful in achieving an overall wellness that changes their lives based on evidence-based therapies, including modalities from the East."

The most successful clients are "the ones who commit to a minimum of three months of weekly or biweekly coaching. These are the clients who really think out what their wellness vision is and what they want to achieve." Using that information, Kaur helps clients set weekly goals.

Kaur's interest in nutrition and wellness began at George Mason University, where she studied psychology and biology. "I took a special biology class where you went out into the community and volunteered your time and then kept a journal about your experience," Kaur explains. "I chose to work with the HIV-positive population back in the early 1990s. As I worked with this clientele it became apparent that nutrition would be an important component of early intervention with HIV-positive patients. I also took an excellent social work class and completed my field work at the Whitman Walker Clinic, an HIV clinic in Washington, D.C. That experience reinforced how much I enjoyed working directly with people and eventually led me to do my thesis on HIV and nutrition."

"I was honored to receive the Emerging Dietetic Leader award for the state of Virginia," says Kaur. "It means a lot to me because I hope to share more about integrative medical nutrition therapy and evidence-based complementary care options like yoga with my colleagues." This goal includes yoga teacher certification, which Kaur is working to obtain. She was also selected for the ADA's Diversity Leader Program, which was created to encourage diversity throughout the leadership of ADA. "I am excited about the exposure to other leaders who influence the nutrition world," she says.

For students considering dietetics as a field of study, Kaur notes that "dietetics really does give you a strong nutrition science background. Not only is it useful on a personal level, but it can also be a great asset when working in the medical field. My bit of advice to students is to know that the field of dietetics is very diverse. You can always find or create a niche once you figure out what you are truly passionate about. Looking to personal experiences can give you an important clue in figuring out what your own special contribution will be to the world." ❧

* Learn more about Kaur at <http://anuhealthy.com/>.



During "Tea Time with the Dietician" events in her clients' homes, certified wellness coach Anu Kaur ('99M) shares nutrition and wellness information in a relaxed, fun setting.