



INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE IN PRIMARY CARE RESIDENCY STRATEGIC AND SUCCESSFUL

Incorporating integrative medicine education into primary care residency training is strategically advancing the movement toward whole health in mainstream medicine to meet an increasing public interest and demand for comprehensive whole health care. Educators and administrators leading this effort are addressing challenges with well-researched curricula and implementation projects - with program success worth sharing and replicating. **Integrative Medicine in Residency (IMR)** is one of the most consistently prolific among these, with a total of 107 locations in the U.S., Canada and Taiwan.

Initially tested in eight pilot sites, IMR is a 200-hour competency-based, interactive, online curriculum in integrative medicine designed for incorporation into primary care residency education. **Mari A. Ricker, MD**, is director of the IMR program launched in 2008 by the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine.



"IMR serves as a singularly effective model for incorporating IM topics currently not included in conventional medical education," says Dr. Ricker; "it has a profound impact because residency training is that point in a physician's career path that shapes patient care behavior most clearly and influences whole health care perspective for the long term."

More than 2500 physicians in family medicine, pediatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry, PM&R, obstetrics & gynecology and preventive medicine residency programs have completed the IMR curriculum. The curriculum is divided into seven core content subjects, including (1) physician well-being, (2) prevention and wellness, (3) tools in integrative medicine, (4) pediatrics, (5) acute care, (6) women's health and (7) chronic illness. Within this foundation, every resident is exposed to content in nutrition, herbs & supplements, vitamins & minerals, as well as mind-body medicine and spirituality. Illness-specific content supports the residents as appropriate in their areas of concentration and interest, i.e., diabetes, heart disease, pain care, etc.

Integrative Medicine education should begin in medical school, but I believe including it in residency training is a higher priority. It is during residencies that attitudes and behaviors of physicians are formed. This is most effective.

– Andrew Weil, MD, 2018



Because every residency is different, courses are modular, allowing unlimited flexibility, customizing content, structure and scheduling into, for example, a longitudinal program, a set of electives, an elective rotation, or courses that can be included in a track. All residents have access to the web-based curriculum at any time. The courses are also available for faculty development.



Todd Kitchens, DO, director of integrative medicine at Central Maine Healthcare since 2015, is very familiar with the IMR program, having started as a resident when it was offered as an option. In the Maine program, each resident is required to complete at least 50% of the IMR curriculum to graduate. It has been incorporated into the overall residency program, with the full IMR curriculum offered as a selective track. Nearly a third of all residents now at Central Maine Healthcare have selected this track.

"From my perspective, the IMR curriculum provides a really good overview of the standard medical approaches to care while opening the residents to other ways of thinking, enhancing the care they provide," says Dr. Kitchens. "Organically, the integrative medicine approach begins to permeate their decision-making and their conversations with patients."

Central Maine is 100% supportive of the IMR program, making it possible for every resident to participate at some level. Dr. Kitchens explains: *"It makes us more efficient with our training time, and we've found it has a positive impact on overall residency program branding, facilitating resident recruitment - at conferences, they seek us out!"*



Dr. Ricker looks forward each year to the *IMR Faculty Development Conference*, supported with grant and foundation funding to encourage every site leader to participate. *"We build this gathering as a restorative weekend and it has become the highlight of my year, providing faculty development, practice and curriculum updates while learning from each other, supporting each other in a program that truly advances integrative medicine and health."*

Starting an IM Residency Program at your Institution

1. Institutional leadership support is critical. Start by talking to your residency program director to determine interest and support, identifying potential faculty who may serve as an IMR curriculum site leader and whether they may want the 30-hour course that introduces them to integrative medicine.
2. Create an implementation plan or syllabus for including IMR in your residency program that includes introducing residents to the curriculum with an assessment and online profile, a schedule for coursework follow-up and ancillary support activities (i.e., visit to local whole foods store to read labels on supplements, yoga and meditation sessions, etc.).
3. Build time for your site leader to connect with other site leaders monthly and during the annual IMR retreat.

RESOURCES

- [Dr. Mari Ricker, director, IMR Program](#)
- [Integrative Medicine in Residency: Developing Competency Through Online Curriculum Training](#)
- [IMR: Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine – Curriculum, Sites and More](#)

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