

Doctor finds way to create more patient time

By opening his own office, Olden can do (holistic) medicine his way

By NICOLE SHELDON

Aaron Olden M.D. tragically lost his 34-year-old brother to an opioid overdose in 2017. Devastated, Olden found hope in his heartache and used it as a catalyst for his latest project.

“My brother’s death made me rethink my professional goals and how I wanted to impact the community and help folks deal with pain in a non-pharmaceutical way,” says Olden.

Olden, 41, grew up in Buffalo and came to Rochester to attend the University of Rochester where he earned an undergraduate degree in biology. He returned to Buffalo for medical school and received an M.D. in internal medicine from the University at Buffalo in 2003.

After obtaining his M.D., he turned around and made his way back to Rochester to do his residency at Strong Memorial Hospital. Along the way he picked up a master’s degree in clinical investigation from UR in 2010.

“After finishing my training I thought that I was going to go into primary care, but as I interviewed with and met primary care doctors, I became very discouraged by how little time they had to spend with their patients,” says Olden. “I went into medicine for the doctor/patient relationship. That’s what I enjoy most about my job.”

In fact, according to [Statista](#), 22 percent of doctors spend 9 to 12 minutes with patients, 29 percent spend an average of 13 to 16 minutes with patients and 33 percent spend 17 to 24 minutes with each patient.

Olden went on to participate in a fellowship in palliative care, drawn to the field due to its emphasis on communication, and for 10 years of his practice he worked in hospice and helped patients manage pain and other symptoms that accompany chronic illnesses.

“I helped start the palliative care program at Unity Hospitals and I worked there for four years,” says Olden. “As part of my work I would sometimes visit patients at home. I really enjoyed that, so I pitched a program to Lifetime Care to see what they thought about having me come on as their medical director and develop a home care program where a doctor would visit patients at home.”

Olden enjoyed working with Lifetime Care for four years, but he answered what felt like a calling to start his own distinct medical practice. While he says he felt like he was making a tangible difference in the Rochester community through Lifetime Care, he longed to broaden his reach to help even more people.

His desire to reach more patients coupled with the unexpected loss of his brother gave Olden the nudge to start a medical practice featuring the ideals of both Eastern and Western medicine. Mindful Medicine Rochester officially opened at 421 Penbrooke Drive in



Photo by Kate Melton

Aaron Olden

Penfield in 2018. Still in its infancy, the young business is full of potential.

Olden says he spent most of 2018 studying and training to perform acupuncture at the Helms Medical Institute in Berkeley, Calif. The program specifically targets physicians, bringing a Western spin on the traditional form of Chinese medicine.

“I basically set out to do this training and made a goal for myself that said in a year I will leave my job and start this practice and make a difference in a new way,” says Olden. “I really like to create things. Some people’s creative energy is artistic like painting or dancing, and for me it’s creating in this way and making things happen.”

Mindful Medicine specializes in patients experiencing pain and mental health issues. Olden, the sole employee of the practice, looks at his patients as a whole using the biopsychosocial model rather than just honing in on where the patient’s pain is located. The model was founded by Drs. George Engel and John Romano at the University of Rochester.

The biopsychosocial approach takes into consideration biological, psychological and social factors and their complex interactions in terms of understanding health, illness and health care delivery. Olden says he takes into account factors such as levels of stress at work and at home, and if stress and anxiety is being manifested as physical pain.

The majority of Olden’s work is in medical acupuncture, but he also helps folks determine if their medications are helping them.

“I don’t want to step on the toes of anybody’s primary care doctor, but in some cases I have been able to get people off medications that have just been there and haven’t been looked at in a while,” he says. “I’ve also been getting into CBD

a little bit. I’m honest with people that there isn’t a lot of great research out there yet, but the reason for that is because we haven’t been allowed to research it in our country, so research is still catching up with the market. I counsel people on using it and finding a good brand.”

Olden also finds he has been able to connect his patients with other like-minded physicians and practitioners in the area. For instance, if he feels like a patient would benefit from a few sessions of physical therapy, he has individuals that he feels comfortable referring them to.

Olden approaches Mindful Medicine with a holistic outlook and does not reject the benefits of Western medicine. In fact, his husband is a professor in St. John Fisher’s Wegmans School of Pharmacy, so he understands and appreciates the necessity for traditional Western medicine.

“If I had appendicitis, I want a great surgeon to take my appendix out, and if I have pneumonia, I want antibiotics,” he says. “But I don’t think doctors are the problem. I think it’s the system where people are just being moved from one thing to the next.”

At a patient’s initial visit, Olden spends over an hour getting to know them and coming up with a treatment plan. All follow-up appointments are typically 45 minutes to an hour.

“I made a difficult decision not to take insurance. I struggled with it because I really believe in serving everybody,” reveals Olden. “I’m countering the fact that my practice services a certain segment of the population by offering my services in other ways to those who can’t afford it. For instance, acupuncture in the ear is easy to do; you don’t need to remove any clothing and it’s so effective for stress and anxiety. I could do that sort of things at health fairs and it’s not hard to organize.”

Olden says his dream is for Mindful Medicine to change the health of Rochester as a whole. It did not take him long to realize that there is significant local interest for this type of practice. When he first opened the business most of the patients coming through his doors were referrals from other primary care doctors, but Olden notes that word-of-mouth has started to pick up.

“Like starting anything new, there’s fear that comes with it,” admits Olden. “But I try to look at it as maybe that fear is the universe telling you to do it. We have to take risks in life.”

In 2017 Olden was awarded a Rochester Business Journal Forty Under 40 Award. He notes that this achievement was yet another impetus prodding him to take the leap and open his own small business.

“Winning Forty Under 40 connected me with some great individuals like a financial advisor, accountant, lawyer,” he says. “As a physician, my network was mainly health care providers. But with Forty Under 40 I found myself in this business world and it was fun to think about what it takes to start a business. I realized I could have my own small business and do it myself with the help from the people I met through Forty Under 40.”

Olden received signs left and right to pursue Mindful Medicine. He took the plunge and emboldens others to do the same when it comes to facing fears.

“It’s easy to succumb to the voice in your head that says it’s too scary or you can’t do it,” says Olden. “But creating something is so fulfilling. Like anything else that’s exhilarating, like traveling to another country or bungee jumping, some of the scariest things are also the most rewarding.”

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