Jane Oh, MD, stands at the front of the warm candle-lit studio and welcomes the 10 women who are seated on yoga mats. “We’ll begin in child’s pose,” she says, then cues them to rest their hips on their heels, place their forehead lightly on the mat and extend their arms long in front. She then tells them to begin breathing in and out like the ocean’s tides—a technique that calms the mind and warms the body.

Tonight, she isn’t Dr. Oh, an internal medicine physician with Park Nicollet in Burnsville, she’s Jane, an instructor at Core Power Yoga in Apple Valley. Oh has been teaching at the studio on Thursday nights for the past two years—something she admits she’s passionate about. “I felt that because of my background taking care of people and their bodies, I would have something special to give to teaching,” she says of her reason for becoming a yoga instructor.

A longtime runner, Oh’s journey to yoga began about 15 years ago, when her husband, who competes in marathons, brought her to her first class. “It was intense Bikram-style yoga in a 105-degree room with humidity,” she says. “I loved it. It was so different from what I had done with running. I liked being able to connect the breath and movement. It was a whole different way to be in my body.”

Oh found yoga isn’t just about exercise, it’s about mindfulness and feeling grounded. “Having a very stressful job and being the mother of two children, I was always running. Going to yoga was a place to unwind—to get away from the day, to give back to myself,” she says.

She’s also found it has renewed her energy for medical practice. “I’m not exactly sure why, but when I’m sitting in a room with a patient, I can more easily listen with compassion. As a physician, there’s a lot of suffering we’re witness to, and I can be there without completely absorbing all of it.”

Although she knows of other physicians who practice yoga, and even sees some at the studio where she teaches, she knows many still view it with skepticism. Oh is hoping to change that. At the HealthPartners Institute’s “Flourishing in Your Work and Life” conference last month, she led a yoga practice geared toward physicians. “Doctors really need to learn how to take care of themselves,” she says.

She’s also received a grant from the Park Nicollet Foundation to do a six-week mind-body workshop to help internal medicine physicians, family physicians, pediatricians and other primary care providers find ways to be mindful in their daily work. “People don’t know what it is,” she says of mindfulness, “Unless you have context for it, it’s hard to understand. That’s why I’m doing this. The more doctors and nurses know about it, the more they will be able to pass it on to their patients.”

Oh says she sometimes talks to her own patients about the importance of mindfulness—for example, to take deep breaths when they’re in a stressful situation. “I’ve talked to them about trying to find a practice of meditation. Yoga is a practice of meditation with movement.”

In the meantime, she’ll continue practicing yoga four to five times a week and teaching. “I love being in the studio,” she says. “It’s so different from being in the medical clinic, and it’s a lot of fun.” – KIM KISER