

Turning to Alternative Therapy

by Christel Danning

A large number of today's population is turning to alternative methods of medical treatments for various reasons, such as the high cost of insurance, high priced medications, and the feeling that modern day medications just don't work or have side effects that may be worse than the conditions being treated. With hundreds of methods of alternative medicine, including acupuncture, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, magnet therapy, iridology, reflexology, therapeutic massage, and aromatherapy it is hard to believe in what really works. The validity and actual healing abilities of alternative therapies is an ongoing debate, even today. Some believe what worked thousands of years ago may not work in today's society.

It is documented that alternative therapies date back thousands of years in various forms of use such as healing, religious rituals, and ceremonies to name a few. Aromatherapy, for one, dates back over 10,000 years in India through the practice of Ayurvedic medicine ^[1]. The Chinese also have early written records written around 2697 B.C. These records, "The Yellow Emperor's classic of Internal Medicine" written by Huang Ti, "(have) various therapeutic applications using aromatics. Many of these preparations are still in use today." ^[1] More recently, aromatherapy as a terminology, coined in 1937 after a laboratory explosion led to the discovery of the healing properties of lavender essential oil, proved the antiseptic properties of essential oils. Were this true, and all historical documentations aside, why is it that today some hesitate to trust in the healing abilities of essential oils? One reason could possibly be the promise of a blanket result, while another could be the conscious or unconscious misuse of the essential oils themselves.

One example of the above is the California court case where Aroma Vera, Inc. of Los Angeles, sued for false advertising, lost it's case against the National Council against Health Fraud, the plaintiff ^[2]. This case involved the claims that certain blends had therapeutic benefits that appeared to be unfounded. This company was forced to pay a fine and remove it's advertising. The distrust of aromatherapy may also be attributed to the misuse of essential oils for treatments, such as were once practiced by Gary Young of YLEO. It was claimed that when he dropped essential oils on the backs of patients during 'raindrop therapy' and their skin showed a reaction, it was toxins escaping – when in fact it was a reaction to the undiluted oils ^[3]. Yet, if distrust and disbelief were predominant, why is it that the essential oil industry alone is so popular, and growing exponentially?

There are multiple sites where the general public may purchase essential oils, and books which give broad and general instructions for the use of the purchased oils. This however facilitates a distinct potential for problematic results, as not all of these books stress the precautions of using essential oils, and can contradict each other in the use thereof. Some manuals, in fact, contradict *themselves*! One example is Body

Mind Spirit, a publication of various sections including aromatherapy, yoga, astrology, and reiki, states that ginger essential oil is good for use in the bath; whereas, the next page states not to use ginger essential oil in the bath ^[4]! With this inconsistent information, it is easy to see how the public can become misinformed as to the use of and therapeutic benefits pertaining to essential oils.

Health Foods Business estimated that the total of aromatherapy products sold through health-food stores was approximately \$59 million in 1995 and \$105 million in 1996 ^[5]. "Over the past few years, aromatherapy, once considered a somewhat quirky concept, has become a mainstream, multibillion-dollar industry" ^[6]. In fact, the question arose: "What's inspiring aromatherapy products? Research. "Science has proven beyond a doubt that scent modulates mood," says Avery Gilbert, Ph.D., president of the Sense of Smell Institute, in New York City" ^[6].

Research attempts to discredit the benefits of aromatherapy, such as a March 2008 article in the Science Daily which states: "One of the most comprehensive investigations done to date on aromatherapy failed to show any improvement in either immune status, wound healing or pain control among people exposed to two often-touted scents" ^[7]. Despite this, however, people are able to use essential oils to their benefit without quite knowing why they work – just that they do.

Claims Officer Baker: "When working crime scene investigations, the scene takes a physical and emotional toll on the officer, even a seasoned officer. I found that using lavender and peppermint essential oils in my facial mask helped balance my psyche and physical being to aid me in doing my duties. On those days, I was able to perform my duties without upsetting myself and or others around me. I quickly realized that on the days I forgot to use the oils, I was scattered, distracted, and violently ill - not a very good condition to be in at a crime scene"^[8]. Another use the officer had for essential oils is when speaking to victims' families. "When speaking to families regarding the crime, I would place lavender essential oil on my hand and hold their hand, all to aid in calming them, unbeknownst to them. When they placed their hands over their faces while crying, they then inhaled the oils, receiving its calming properties. I did notice that they would calm faster than those I spoke to without the availability of the oils". ^[8]

When given proper instructions, used correctly, and with adequate education, essential oils can be very beneficial to the emotional and physical well being of a person. In a WebMD featured article from Psychology Today, Nancy Fowler, a registered nurse with a master's in psychology and the health services director at a mental health treatment center, introduced aromatherapy to teenagers as an alternative to medication, restraint, or seclusion. "As people are faced with what else can we use, I'm always searching and trying to figure out what could be effective that's less restrictive, and that could have a beneficial outcome"^[9]:

In a 2004 study, Fowler found that 28 of 43 students asked for aromatherapy at least once when they felt frustrated or agitated.

Of the group that used it, 21 of them later said that they felt calmer or more relaxed afterward. Fowler's results were published in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, a journal of the International Society of Psychiatric, Mental Health Nurses in Madison, Wisconsin. The study originally began as part of Fowler's aromatherapy training.

During the three months before aromatherapy was introduced, the school's nurses administered 631 oral doses of as needed sedatives, used as a supplement to regular prescriptions when students feel agitated. The nurses administered another 43 doses by injection during the same three months. In the first three months of aromatherapy use, the numbers fell to 397 oral doses and 31 injections. While Fowler cautions that the results are not statistically significant, they are encouraging, she says. ^[9]

There are many areas of benefits from the use of essential oils, from healthier hair and nails and skin to improved digestion, stress reduction, mental clarity, and pain reduction. When creating blends as part of obtaining certification, several friends were asked if they would be interested in assisting by filling out client data sheets, and having an oil blend created specifically for them to help with any of their personal health concerns. While this author has had personal experiences in the benefits of aromatherapy, others may not be so fortunate. After the creation of the blends and delivering them to the potential clients, I was quite pleased to hear that every client had something positive to say about aromatherapy, in addition to the feeling that it was very beneficial to them. One client had claims of frequent acid reflux. Upon follow up, and after the use of the personal blend, he reported that he suffered only one attack in a two-week period, and was exceedingly thrilled. He further reported that even his dandruff seemed to be clearing up. Following the ten clients needed for class, I met others also needing relief in one form or another. An elderly woman had a painfully sprained wrist, and difficulty sleeping. Considering this, I created a pain cream specifically for her with lavender as a main ingredient. After the first night of use, she claimed to have had her best night's sleep in a very long time.

Serious doubts may plague a person's decision about the path they choose when studying aromatherapy, due to the varying amounts of research dealing with the pros and cons of alternative medicine. It appears, however, that positive client feedback coupled with scientific research ranging from hospitals to psychological publications (too many to list here) the overwhelming benefits of aromatherapy seems supported adequately. Personally, after researching many avenues related to this field, I believe aromatherapy is one of the several alternative managements that are here to stay. I, for one, have not been disappointed - and intend to continue my education into this field for decades to come.

References:

- 1: Aroma Apothecary. *Clinical Aromatherapy Level 1*. 2002; 1:2
2. <http://www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/News/mehrban.html>
3. <http://www.quackwatch.org/11Ind/young.html>
4. IMP AB. *Enhancing your Mind, Body, Spirit*. 2005; Natural Healing, Aromatherapy, 1:1-2
5. <http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/aroma.html>
6. <http://www.goodhousekeeping.com/beauty/products/heaven-scents-0902>
7. "Aromatherapy May Make You Feel Good, But It Won't Make You Well, Study Shows" *ScienceDaily* (Mar. 4, 2008)
8. Crime scene investigator, Officer J. N. Baker.
9. <http://www.webmd.com/balance/features/aromatherapy-to-calm-teens>

For Further Reading:

Websites:

- <http://users.erols.com/sisakson/pages/agoindex.htm>
<http://www.holisticwebworks.com/Aromatherapy-Articles.htm>
http://www.webmd.com/search/search_results/default.aspx?sourceType=e=all&query=essential%20oils%2C%20aromatherapy
http://atlanticinstitute.com/es_winter1999.html
<http://www.quackwatch.org/index.html>
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/03/080303093553.htm>
<http://www.associatedcontent.com/subject/article/aromatherapy>
<http://www.naha.org/research.htm>

Publications:

The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy – V. A. Worwood
Aromatherapy – edited by Jo Richardson
Prescription for Nutritional Healing - Phyllis A. Balch CNC
The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Essential Oils – Julia Lawless
500 Formulas for Aromatherapy – Carol and David Schiller