



complementary therapies & hiv

Monday 31st March 2003

Summary by Robert Fieldhouse

Speakers:

Dr John Wright, Nkosi Johnson Clinic, Charing Cross Hospital

Gus Cairns, Editor in Chief, Positive Nation Magazine

At this month's information forum **Dr. John Wright** from the Nkosi Johnson unit at Charing Cross hospital and Gus Cairns, Editor-in-Chief, Positive Nation magazine gave two extremely engaging and thought-provoking talks about the use of complementary therapies by people with HIV.

Dr Wright told the audience "the physical body needs to be as fit as possible for the immune system to work at its peak". He suggested people should consider giving up junk food, smoking and recreational drugs as a good place to make a start. Discussing the role of the emotional body, he said "the emotional body needs to be free, don't hold on to the past.

Your spiritual body needs to be in touch with the universe". He challenged the audience; "it is your choice whether you want to help yourself. The choice is a difficult one for many".

Dr. Wright has worked extensively in Africa and Australia. He headed up complementary therapies in Australia and worked to have them accepted into medical schemes there.

Dr. Wright discussed the commonest mental thought patterns that cause disease in our bodies; Anger-Resentment-Criticism-Guilt. Taking a look at the body as a whole, he discussed which body parts are affected by different stresses. He presented the following suggestions;

Emotions and Physical Symptoms

Heart	feeling unloved or insecure.	Spleen	worry.
Chest	pride, stubbornness, inability to take in life.	Kidney	fear, disappointment, failure.
Stomach	anger, frustration, resentment.	Small bowel	unable to assimilate new ideas.
Liver	chronic complaining, resistance to change, hatred.	Large bowel	unable to let go of the past.
		Bladder	not being in control of one's life.
		Back	lack of support in life.

He discussed a stress reduction technique which he described as "pain-free and peaceful, though the person may experience some emotional reaction and some symptom sensation as their issues are worked through. The releasing points for the technique are the meridian points of the frontal fontanel. Dialogue between the person and the therapies during the release is an integral part of the whole process. Visualisation techniques and affirmation of new thought patterns whilst the technique is being carried out are encouraged. Completion can take between 3 and 30 minutes.

His closing remarks were well-received by the audience "anyone who is HIV-positive is part of the universal design; they are empowered, they are important, they are loved by life itself and they should love and appreciate themselves."

"Complementary therapies may be the place where in today's society the healing value of 'bedside manner' finds itself. Central to them also is a view of medicine as process rather than cure — a collaborative endeavour between patient and practitioner to move towards a way of life that is physical, psychologically and spiritually healthier."

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Gus Cairns wrote much of the NAM Directory of Complementary Therapies, which was published last year. In a talk entitled The Power of Belief, Gus discussed the power of the placebo effect. He told the audience "My contention is that far from being imaginary the placebo effect is hugely powerful - and that harnessing it in oneself can be a powerful intensifier of conventional medicine.

Gus Cairns stressed when planning his talk he wanted to address the sceptics of complementary therapies. Describing himself as a naturally sceptical person.

"I've seen too many people with HIV actually damage their own health by trying to rely on nothing but complementary therapies for too long...and yet I have been a dedicated user of many approaches at different times".

Some complementary medicine eg supplements, massage, acupuncture have been evaluated using clinical trials.

"In some cases it's a good job clinical trials have been done. For example St John's wort, used for depression, reduces indinavir levels in the body by an average of 57% and significantly reduces nevirapine levels. Milk thistle, reduces indinavir trough levels by 25%. Garlic supplements, used to help digestive symptoms and reduce cholesterol, reduce blood saquinavir levels by 51%. Gus argued that "the placebo effect is the only explanation for how many of them (complementary therapies) work."

"Placebos have been found to be as effective as state of the art anti-depressants."

In terms of reducing the risk of heart attacks, Gus drew on data from a vitamin E study which showed a 47% reduction in the risk of all heart attacks and a 77% reduction in non-fatal ones with daily supplementation of 400-800 IUs of Vitamin E. By comparison, one daily aspirin has been shown to reduce the risk of heart attack by 28% in people who have never had a heart attack.

Products, Procedures, Practices	
The sceptical complementary therapies user - how to set up your own placebo effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ intensive consultation■ trust between patient and practitioner■ medicine as process, not as cure■ the will to succeed■ ritual and discipline

"Using complementary therapies can help people feel that they are taking control back. The complementary therapies that are right for you are the ones that you find. It is you who can choose the best for you."