The Art & Science of Reflexology

Mary Martin has had a busy practice in Ruislip since 1983. She belongs to a network of therapists attached to the Cancer Centre at Mount Vernon Hospital. Mary founded the Association of Reflexologists in 1984 and is an Honorary Life Member. A qualified teacher, she established her School of Reflexology in 1987. She can be contacted on Tel: 01895 635621.

An essential element of Reflexology is treating the 'whole person' rather than a specific disorder in isolation. Supporting people with chronic illness complements orthodox medicine. Cancer care is one example, but Reflexology adapts to suit different needs.

Chronic Illnesses

Chronic illnesses develop slowly and are deep-seated. They are accompanied by a general deterioration in health and wellbeing. Where illness cannot be reversed, beneficial changes have come about in the following ways:

- Pain relief;
- Functional improvement;
- Symptomatic relief;
- Reduced side-effects of medication;
- Reduced stress and anxiety;
- Psychological support.

Case Example

**Richard** (aged 60) was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease eight years prior to consulting me. He had difficulty in swallowing — and a fear of choking. There were also other problems with muscle control. He was unable to relax, and felt depressed. For several years he awoke every hour of the night. Richard had no sense of taste or smell. A side-effect of drugs had caused long-term constipation.

The Effects of Reflexology

Initially I carried out weekly treatments. Within six weeks Richard was swallowing normally, and his fear of choking was alleviated. He felt relaxed and slept better. Richard said that he felt 'uplifted'. He was more positive. His circulation improved. He told me that he had more sensitivity in his fingers, and better control of muscle movement. Bowel function improved considerably. A sense of taste and smell re-appeared for brief periods but not permanently.

Later, he attended hospital in conjunction with research. Doctors were surprised at the results and showed a great interest in Reflexology. I treated Richard for three years. During this time he remained on the same level of drugs as when he was first diagnosed — 11 years previously. He drove a long distance to see me. Reflexology improved his quality of life and appeared to slow down the progression of Parkinson's disease.

**Rachel** (aged 66) was diagnosed with a rare condition called Pseudomyxoma peritonei three years prior to seeing me. This is a slow growing mucus tumour that starts in the appendix, ovary or digestive system. There is no cure at present. The tumour produces large amounts of jelly-like substance (mucus) in the abdomen that increases in size. In this case it weighed seven kilos. Tumours also formed on top of the abdominal organs.

This extra weight placed great strain on her legs, feet, hips and spine. It also pressed against the diaphragm and affected her breathing. Constipation had been a problem for eight months. Rachel also had chronic psoriasis on her legs. She felt stressed, and sometimes depressed, about her situation.

The Effects of Reflexology

Within five treatments the pains in his feet lessened considerably, and his GP reduced his drugs. His circulation improved and his bowel function normalized. He also enjoyed better quality sleep. His wife said that he was much happier.

**John** (aged 66) was referred to me by his GP. He developed epilepsy at the age of four, and had full seizures until his 20s. These then took the form of petit mal. A side-effect of his anticonvulsant drugs caused severe pains in his feet and lower legs. He was prescribed two drugs to counteract this, but he was still in pain — and very anxious about taking so many drugs. Constipation was another side effect. John's circulation was poor.

The Effects of Reflexology

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**John** continues with therapy to maintain this improvement.

The Human Touch

Chronic illness has a devastating impact on people — not just physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. In a therapeutic sense, human contact is a powerful force. Patients often prefer to express their anxieties to therapists, because they do not want to 'burden their relatives'.

In our technological culture 'touch therapies' such as Reflexology, have an important role to play alongside orthodox medicine. Where there is fear and distress, touch can communicate reassurance and compassion. Touch also facilitates a sense of peace and security — when complete healing is not possible — or when life is ebbing away.