

Holistic Approach To Healing



By Gerri Kobren/Photos by David Harp

Zoh Meyerhoff Hieronimus conceived the idea of creating a healing center at Ruscombe.

IT'S A SUBTLE ENERGY," SAYS HANDS-ON HEALER JACKIE AUGER. "IT'S SPIRITUAL, BUT NOT RELIGIOUS. I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW IT WORKS; I JUST KNOW IT DOES."

"She thinks about the light, she has an invocation that is a thanking for the energy that comes. She puts her hands on my head and I perceive a warmth. I get more relaxed immediately. I've come to her half a dozen times, and most of the time it's been because I needed to recharge, or tune up."

Shelley Koffler, an advertising copywriter and musician, visits Ms. Auger, whose healing method is known as MariEl, not just for relief from occasional physical ills; more often, she says, it is "to have my energies balanced, or to learn. I don't believe people are healers. I believe people can be channels for healing. . . . Everyone has the ability to channel healing energy. You can sensitize yourself to the energies around you."

"Some people have more of a gift for it, but any mother does the same thing when her child is hurt," Ms. Auger says. MariEl requires training, she insists but it is available to all. "Love," she says, "is the healing energy, and anyone who loves can heal."

Some people talk in terms of "chi."

"The best translation of this," says Kathleen Galloway, a registered nurse and acupuncturist, "is 'life force,' the good sense of well-being you get when you're a kid running down the street. But chi doesn't maintain itself. Like a car that doesn't get tuned up it gets out of balance. Acupuncture is like tuning up your car; it returns your body to homeostasis [internal balance]."

"One has to activate the life energy; we have to activate the vital force to take over, and then the patient is healing himself or herself," says Dr. Pete Hinderberger. A physician educated in modern medicine in Switzerland, he practices "anthroposophical homeopathy," a combination of two healing philosophies, at the Ruscombe Mansion, a "holistic health collective" surrounded by the new community of Coldspring.

Self healing. The healing light. The life energy that is within the body, and also accessible from outside. The subtle, spiritual, mystical something that somehow, in ways not comprehended by the science of the Western world, makes the blood flow and the lungs pump and the heart beat and the brain think and the mind and body get better.

These are difficult concepts for those of us who believe germs make us sick and pills or surgery make us well.

"Western medicine works only with the laws of the physical body," Dr. Hinderberger says. "Western medical philosophy does not acknowledge that there is a life energy," because no one can weigh it, measure it, see it, or submit it to [scientific] studies and statistical analyses.

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Kathleen Galloway takes pulse of Robert Young during an acupuncture session. Mr. Young is a reflexologist at Ruscombe.

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Dr. Hinderberger simply accepts it. And when it gets out of whack, he looks for ways to get it back into balance with proper nutrition, exercise, movement therapies, art or color therapy, and homeopathy. This last comes from the teachings of Samuel Hahnemann, who, about 200 years ago, used dilute solutions of plant-derived potions to treat illness. Anthroposophy is the theory of Rudolph Steiner, a turn-of-the-century mystic, who believed in treating illness by realigning the balance among an organism's three main systems: the nerve and sensory system, the limb and metabolic system, and the rhythmic (or pulsational system).

When this doesn't work, Dr. Hinderberger sometimes will refer patients to an acupuncturist, who "unblocks" the vital energy so other remedies can work.

On occasion, he'll write a prescription — in the past year, he figures, he's done that maybe 15 or 20 times. Also, routinely, he orders the appropriate lab work: "If someone comes in with chronic fatigue, I get a complete blood count, glucose tolerance test, test of thyroid function. If there are enlarged lymph glands, I send

and lab tests and to see a specialist for a biopsy."

In fact, he says, he makes a point of sending patients to oncologists, or gynecologists, or neurologists, or whatever regular, Western-type physicians he believes they ought to be seeing in addition to him.

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In the 1970s, the Ruscombe Mansion was the center of Savitria, a commune devoted to meditation, creativity, mystic studies and the search for the spiritual self. Its leader was Baltimore artist Robert Hieronimus, whose murals have featured the strange cyclopean eye and pyramid that appear on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States and on the back of the dollar bill. When Coldspring was built and Savitria disbanded, Mr. Hieronimus retained his lease on the mansion. For a while, he and his wife, Zoh Meyerhoff Hieronimus, rented it out. In July 1984, however, their tenant gave notice, "and without any hesitation," Mrs. Hieronimus says, "what popped into my mind was a healing center."

Mrs. Hieronimus has Crohn's disease, a chronic intestinal inflammation for which she has had to undergo major surgery. But she

forms of healing and, while spurning further treatment with conventional medications, she has submitted herself to acupuncture, past-life regression, psychotherapy, homeopathy and a diet of organically grown foods. By the time she was ready to put together her healing collective, therefore, she already knew many holistic practitioners, and they knew others. Within three weeks, she had the place rented and ready to open.

The current group is heavy with massage therapists. For instance, Larry Adams practices Zero Balancing, using his hands to assess and adjust energy flowing through the major joints of the body. Robert Young, a reflexologist who treats what ails you by massaging the special places on feet that reflexologists believe reflect other places on or in the body, also does a more spiritual kind of therapy called Reiki — "It means channeling the healing energy," he says; the "-ki" is another term for chi. And Alan Abramson does massage and acupressure.

Ms. Auger, who also practices at Ruscombe, started with Reiki and then moved on to MariEI, which

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she believes works more quickly in getting a client to the point of talking about and releasing the barely remembered pains

block the good, healing energy. "As the session proceeds, unexpected memories, images, and symbols come up; whatever comes up is what the person is ready to deal with," she says.

Nutrition is another aspect of Ruscombe's offerings. Kelvin Levitt, a registered pharmacist who gave up on pharmaceuticals when he realized that more and more people were taking more and more chemicals for problems he believed were "caused by poor diet, poor attitude, and lack of exercise," advises clients about nutritional sup-

"... any mother does the same thing when her child is hurt ... anyone who loves can heal." — Jackie Auger



Hands-on healer Jackie Auger with Dixie Mullineaux at Ruscombe.

plements and plant remedies.

Music and dance are being used as healing arts by several. There is Eileen Borris, who has a doctorate in education and specializes in helping sick people visualize a revitalized immune system working to stroy their diseases. She uses music and guided imagery to facilitate psychotherapy. Janet Mowry heals with music, massage and Reiki, and Simona Aronow, a dance therapist with a full-time job at Sheppard Pratt, sees clients who want to

work out their physical/emotional kinks through dance-like movement.

Karl Schlotterbeck, a school psychologist in Anne Arundel County, practices past-life regression therapy at Ruscombe. He takes clients on voyages of discovery to previous incarnations to find unresolved experiences that are intruding on this life and causing headaches, phobias, anxieties and other violent or frightening thoughts.

"Most people come to me after they've been to the — quote — legitimate therapists, and now they're desperate," Mr. Schlotterbeck says. Their fears and phobias, resistant to years of traditional treatment, disappear, he says, after a couple of hours of exploration of ancient traumas.

"You don't have to believe in reincarnation for this therapy to work," he adds. "At the most objective level, we're looking at images that are at the back of the mind and are causing inappropriate behavior, and we're bringing those images to consciousness, which frees the person from the compulsiveness."

And Ms. Galloway, along with partners Sarah Heaton and Mary Phelps Seidel, both registered nurses, practices traditional acupuncture.

In the year and a half since the first group moved in, some have moved out and new people have taken their places. But now the current renters at the collective vote on whether new applicants should be granted office space.

Mrs. Hieronimus retains the position of "volunteer director." She does not, however, supervise the practitioners. Neither, for that matter, does Dr. Hinderberger, the only medical doctor in the group. Each member of the collective is independent of the others; while they may consult among themselves or refer clients to one another, they also refer people to therapists and physicians with offices elsewhere. Some have other offices or jobs elsewhere.

They do not contend that they cure; the goal is to put people into the kind of energy balance in which they can cure themselves. However, they admit some clients are too far along in disease, even for them.

They say they work with people who exhibit the gamut of human

"I always ask, 'What does your family doctor say?'"

ills, from terminal diseases to anorexia to the blahs. A lot of their clients, the practitioners say, are peo-

ple who look with suspicion at the draconian offerings of scientific medicine and want something less dependent on technology. Or they are people who have some deep-seated interest of their own in esoteric things, or they are people who already have had standard Western therapies and have not been helped.

However, their approach is not so comprehensive as the "holistic" title implies. While there are some Western-trained therapists who have embraced holism in part or in principle, holistic practitioners generally do not use the arts and sciences of European and American medicine. That is left to doctors the holists call the allopaths — physicians who aim to cure disease by attacking symptoms.

In fact, many Ruscombe practitioners make a point of their eagerness to send clients to specialists. "If, as I work," says Mr. Young, "I find something, I say in a way that does not threaten the person, 'How long has it been since you had a checkup?' or 'When was the last time you went to the dentist?'"

"Any client who comes to us with high blood pressure has a doctor who is treating it," insists Mr. Levitt, the pharmacist-nutritionist. "I always ask, 'What does your family doctor say?' or 'You had better talk to your doctor and get a treatment plan started; once you're on medication, then we'll work on your diet.'"

Non-medical healing goes back to the dawn of time. While it may have gone underground or been dismissed in the Western world, there now is a resurgence of scientific interest in all sorts of phenomena that are outside the boundaries of medical science as we know it.

The Maryland Medical Chirurgical Faculty [Med-Chi, the state's medical society] has taken no official stance on holism in general, or the Ruscombe Mansion in particular. Clients of the individual practitioners report that their physicians approve. According to a cancer patient who is seeing Dr. Borris, "My oncologist said, 'Anything that works for you is fine.'"

Holism has also moved into the institutional setting. For instance, Mimi Bronner, assistant professor in the University of Maryland's graduate school of nursing, is teaching and practicing "therapeutic touch" at University Hospital.

Acupuncture, which has been gaining adherents in this country since its introduction in the mid-'70s, is being taught at the Center for Traditional Acupuncture in Columbia. According to Ms. Galloway, there are at least 35 acupuncturists

practicing in the state. Her own fees — \$50 for an initial visit and \$35 after that — sometimes are reimbursed by medical insurance.

Dance therapy is well into the mainstream, with a master's level program in Dance/Movement Therapy at Goucher College and dance therapists working in many local mental institutions. Music therapy and imagery were among the lecture topics at a conference last month on "holistic health concepts" in cardiovascular nursing at the University of Maryland at Baltimore.

Visualization techniques, the kind Dr. Borris is offering to people who suffer from major physical diseases, were developed 15 years ago for cancer patients by radiologist O. Carl Simonton and his then-wife Stephanie, a psychotherapist. Dr. Borris was herself trained at the Simonton's Cancer Counselling and Research Center in Texas.

Holism also embraces many more practitioners and kinds of practice than can be found at Ruscombe. At the mansion, one can pick up a directory that lists more than 100 self-defined holistic therapists or therapy centers in the Baltimore area. They include doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, chiropractors, massage therapists, martial arts and yoga instructors, astrologers, and various other counselors and posture, movement and touch therapists.



Dr. Peter Hinderberger