

In a remarkable article The Prince of Wales explains his

Chelsea Flower Show exhibit — and says the NHS should offer alternative healing



MY HEALING GARDEN



by Prince Charles

AT THE Chelsea Flower Show this week some of you may possibly come across a garden for which I have been partly responsible.

I have called it The Healing Garden and have dedicated it to the memory of my beloved grandmother, The Queen Mother, as, apart from anything else, she introduced me to the practice of homeopathy, in which she had an abiding interest.

The garden is designed to remind people of our interconnectedness with Nature and of the beneficial medicinal properties She provides through countless plants, flowers and trees.

Throughout the 20th century, so much ancient, accumulated, traditional wisdom has been thrown away whether in the fields of medicine, architecture, agriculture or education.

The baby was thrown out with the bathwater, so this garden is designed to bring the baby back again and to remind us of that priceless, traditional knowledge before we lose the rich store of Nature's healing gifts for the benefit of our descendants.

Every one of the 8,500 plants belonging to the 125 species represented in the garden has therapeutic value.

Some are there because, as well as having health benefits, they are delicious to eat. Asparagus, for instance, used for centuries in traditional folk medicine as a tonic and sedative, has been found rich in vital antioxidant vitamins.

Others have an important role in medicine, whether conventional, herbal or homeopathic.

The pharmaceutical industry has long raided the plant world for drugs.

An 18th-century English doctor found that his heart patients recovered after an old village woman dosed them with foxglove. Science has since extracted the drug digitalis from foxglove leaves and, as digoxin, it is now a widely used heart regulator.

EVEN the most poisonous plants have medicinal properties. Deadly nightshade, the belladonna, has yielded atropine, a drug that dilates the pupil for eye examinations and relaxes stomach muscles to relieve intestinal cramps.

Medical herbalists talk about 'synergy', the result of a complex mix of active ingredients in a plant that create a more powerful therapeutic effect together than if isolated.

It's a concept that has a wider application. As the 17th-century poet John Donne said: 'No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.'

It is this sense of being part of something more that may so easily be lost in our material and technologically driven age and for which my garden may serve as a symbol.

Western medicine has tended to regard disease as a parcel of symptoms to be dosed or chopped out, losing sight of the whole person behind the rash or lump and the various emotional and environmental factors that may contribute to their physical problems.

Research in the new field of psychoneuroimmunology — or mind-body medicine, as it is sometimes called — is discovering that there is a constant interplay between our emotions, thoughts and actions and our body systems.

It seems that the food we eat, the air we breathe, the exercise we take, our relationships with other people, all have a direct bearing on our health and natural healing processes.

Complementary medicine has always known this and I believe it is one of the reasons for its enormous popularity.

Many people in the UK use herbal medicines. This is a market estimated to be worth about £126 million a year, and that's only a fraction of the £1.6 billion we spend on complementary and alternative medicine products and visits to practitioners.

Easier access to information

through mass media and the internet has enabled ordinary people to become extraordinarily knowledgeable about medical matters. We want to be involved in our own healthcare.

And, unlike many increasingly harassed GPs, complementary practitioners frequently have more time to ask questions that will put a patient's illness in context with their life.

When GPs are able to see their patients for a longer time, research shows that patients are more satisfied, visit the GP less frequently and require fewer conventional drugs.

THIS 'human effect' is one of the strongest drugs available to both the orthodox and complementary practitioner. They see this as a way of stimulating our own natural healing processes.

The University of Sheffield recently calculated that last year nearly 10 per cent of us actually visited a practitioner of one of the five main complementary therapies. That's 22

million visits, eight million more than the number to hospital accident and emergency departments.

But rather than choosing a few complementary and alternative therapies or orthodox medicine, people want to integrate both.

That is why a recent study showed that 75 per cent of the population think that complementary medicine should be available on the NHS.

For instance, if they suffer from migraine, they want advice on acupuncture and chiropractic as well as powerful pharmaceuticals which, though effective, may have side-effects. Tragically, that is not always possible. Most consultations with therapists are private and, at upwards of £30 an hour, beyond the pocket of many patients.

And with a few honourable exceptions such as osteopathy and chiropractic, complementary and alternative practitioners are not yet professionally regulated, so that it is sometimes difficult to tell who is genuine.

New legislation coming from Europe and the UK is likely to see the introduction of agreed standards of quality control of herbal medicines and further registration of practitioners — the acupuncturists and herbalists are next in line.

It is obviously vital that these important legal provisions are implemented in such a way as to enhance rather than stifle the therapies in question.

A few days ago I launched an initiative to promote the provision of more complementary medicine in the NHS.

FOR many years I have been working towards this goal. Six years ago I set up my Foundation For Integrated Healthcare and now, encouraged by my Foundation, doctors and other healthcare professionals have been working alongside complementary therapists to explore new ways of dealing with the common health problems found in the average GP's surgery.

They have found that complementary therapies often offer considerable relief in conditions such as arthritis that respond poorly to conventional treatment.

Not only this, but complementary therapies can save money by reducing levels of drug prescriptions, demands on GPs' time and the number of referrals to specialists and hospitals.

We have some splendid pioneers. At the Marylebone Health Centre in London, the first NHS practice to employ complementary therapists, of which I became patron 14 years ago, the integrated health team includes an osteopath, a naturopath, an acupuncturist, a massage therapist and a counsellor as well as family doctors.

At the Westminster Primary Care Trust can now refer patients to the centre.

Then there is the Maternity Acupuncture Service at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, joint winners of my Foundation's



Living reminder: The garden at this year's Chelsea Flower Show is a memorial to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and (inset) the dedication boulder

Awards for Good Practice in Integrated Healthcare last year. Here midwife acupuncturists deal with pain relief in labour and pregnancy-related problems such as sickness and backache.

Many health professionals want to introduce complementary therapies but don't know how to begin, or are unaware of the considerable amount of research and expertise now available.

The Integrated Healthcare Initiative is a new way forward led by my Foundation together with the NHS Alliance and the National Association for Primary Care.

Five integrated healthcare projects in primary care trusts around the UK will act as pilot studies to determine how best to deliver complementary therapies with conventional medicine. Another seven projects like the Glastonbury Health Centre, old hands at integrated healthcare, will provide expert advice and support.

What we learn will be shared with all interested health professionals through an electronic networking system that will also circulate information about research studies and conferences. We desperately

need to know more about what works and why, and so the Department of Health will shortly launch a scheme to attract high-calibre researchers in complementary and alternative medicine to selected universities.

I am convinced there is no better moment than now to create a real integration of our healthcare, particularly when there is talk of a Patient-centred NHS.

So much ill-health and disease is due to the misery, stress and alienation we see in our community.

Orthodox medicine is, of course, truly life-saving, but we must also recognise the gifts of other healthcare traditions in offering all possible expertise, knowledge and skills to everyone.

True healing is a synergy that comes not by courtesy of a medical diploma, or even simply through plants.

It lies in the hands and hearts of us all — so I hope this garden may help to open people's hearts once again to the remarkable healing possibilities that exist if we integrate our hearts with our minds and restore a sense of harmony with Mother Nature.

A few of the 125 medicinal species



OLD APOTHECARY'S ROSE: Used, as an aromatherapy oil, to improve mood and counteract grief. Also used as an astringent



REGAL FERN: Was once used for making poultices for wounds. Now used in herbal paste plasters during treatment of lumbago



GREEK VALERIAN: This is a sudorific — it encourages sweating and can also be used for the relief of headaches



WHITE WATERLILY: Used as an astringent, an antiseptic and a demulcent (for soothing irritated skin). Encourages pond life by creating shade



FENNEL: This aniseed-flavoured herb is a stimulant and can be employed to relieve digestive gas and stomach disorders



CINQUEFOIL: This plant is useful as an astringent and in treating peptic ulcers, burns, frostbite and shingles



RAGGED ROBIN: A native wildflower which has a calming effect when used during aromatherapy



CARDOON: This thistle-like plant is good to treating stomach disorders and liver and gall-bladder diseases such as jaundice and hepatitis



CLARY SAGE: The flowers and leaves of 'clear eye' sage are both edible. The leaves can be used to make eye wash and are said to be an aphrodisiac