



ENIGMA

NEWS AND VIEWS ON MENTAL HEALTH

WINTER EDITION June – July – August 2015

This newsletter was put together by the staff of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust.

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OTAGO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TRUST

- Peer Support
- Information, Education
- Advocacy, Consumer Networking
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DISCLAIMER

The opinions and articles expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Otago Mental Health Support Trust or anyone associated with the organisation

We welcome your feedback on our newsletter. See above for contact details.

Alternatively Speaking.....



The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines 'Alternative Medicine' as "any of various systems of healing or treating disease (such as homeopathy, chiropractic, naturopathy, Ayurveda, or faith healing) that are not included in the traditional curricula taught in medical schools of the United States and Britain."

The alternative therapies definition given by Merriam-Webster is in the context of the western medical system. Therein lies the problem. In other cultures the western medical system can be seen as alternative.

In this edition of Enigma we will be looking at a couple of ways people have found alternative or complementary approaches to be helpful in improving their wellbeing. Each example will focus on personal stories of the benefits gained. The key with personal stories is they are just that – personal. Each person needs to explore the research and other people's experiences to see if it could be right for them.

Evidence of the effectiveness of whatever options we use is often difficult to determine. In the field of mental health and wellbeing it seems to me that often evidence of effectiveness is based on practice based evidence and not necessarily on evidence based practice. There is so much we do not know about the brain and the mind. For example serotonin is often linked with depression. However we currently, to my knowledge, do not know if serotonin levels can cause depression or if depression causes change in serotonin levels. Thus to say that giving a SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) antidepressant will stop depression isn't proven.

The point of all this is that in my experience is that if it works for you it works for you.

I once saw a psychiatrist who after discussion described to me some of the options I could take in medications for my depression. In one sense I was shocked thinking "What! You don't know what the best option is?" whilst I also thought "Well it is nice to be given options." My point is that for me it was trying an option to see if it was helpful. The monitoring of it was obviously important. The use of some alternative options to traditional medication can be seen in a similar vein. Evidence based practice must sit alongside practice based evidence. Whatever option we look at to support our wellbeing, whether mainstream or so called alternative or complementary, researching those options is so important so that we can make informed choices.

Introduction to Reflexology



Like most complementary therapies reflexology is believed to have its roots in the ancient civilizations. Earliest traces have been found over 5000 years ago in China, Japan and Egypt. The Incas and Native American Indians also recognized the use of pressure to the feet as a form of healing.

Picture from Precision Reflexology

In the late 1890's Dr. William Fitzgerald, an American Ear, Nose and Throat Surgeon, introduced the therapy to the West as 'zone therapy'. He believed that reflex areas on the feet and hands were linked to other areas and organs of the body within the same zone. In the 1930's Eunice Ingham a physiotherapist developed zone therapy into what is now known as reflexology. She observed that congestion and tension in any part of the foot mirrors congestion and tension in the corresponding part of the body. Doing this she slowly built up a 'map' of the body on the soles of the feet, and to chart the reflex points in a map as we know it today.

Reflexology is now a popular complementary therapy often used alongside conventional care. It is a gentle, non-invasive natural health therapy based on the principle that areas of the feet correspond with regions of the body and by using massage techniques on the foot, the reflexologist encourages the healing process within the corresponding area of the body.

Using hands only, a reflexologist applies specific specialised combinations of thumb and finger pressure to 'reflex' areas found on the feet to bring about a physiological change within the body. When referring to reflex points, 'reflex' is when stimulation at one point brings a response in another area. For an example the toes reflect the head.

It is believed reflexology triggers the body's relaxation response and has a profoundly relaxing effect upon the whole body and mind. Reflexology is known to be particularly helpful for a wide range of stress-related conditions. Reflexology also stimulates the release of endorphins (feel good hormones), natural chemicals which have pain-relieving qualities. The deep sense of relaxation felt, has the effect of reducing muscle tension and relieving stress. A number of scientific studies have shown how reflexology can alleviate the physical symptoms of severe stress and symptoms of mental illnesses, such as Depression and Anxiety disorders. Reflexology is also used in palliative care. A study in an American Cancer Society journal found that one-third of cancer patients used reflexology as a complementary therapy. The late Princess Diana was a big fan of reflexology and had weekly sessions of therapy.

A session of reflexology can last between 30-60 minutes. A full session of reflexology means working on all areas of both feet. Treatment takes place with the client sitting in a semi-reclined position on a chair or lying on a massage table. The room is tranquil with quiet relaxing music playing in the background. Trained reflexologists can be found in any region of New Zealand. If you have a medical condition always check with your GP before starting a session of reflexology.

Anyone can learn the basics of reflexology and then practice this therapy on family and friends and see the benefits.

Learning versus Helping, the Relationship rather than the Individual, Possibility and Hope instead of Fear

-that's Peer Support

A personal experience of Reflexology

My first introduction to reflexology was when I was 13 years old. My 41 year old father was terminally ill with cancer at the time. We lived in a small South Canterbury town where many people were aware of my father's illness. A wonderful woman called Margaret, whom we had never met before, approached my family offering to practice reflexology on my father to give him some comfort and relaxation. One session and the benefits were obvious for my father. He not only felt more comfortable with his pain but his emotional wellbeing was noticeably improved. From that session onwards he looked forward to every visit from Margaret. During these visits my whole family gained a basic understanding of reflexology.

It was not until I was going through a debilitating period of Post Natal Depression with my first child, that I really saw the true value of reflexology. I was experiencing panic attacks, huge anxiety and low moods. Although my mother wasn't trained in reflexology she knew enough to provide me with the amazing benefits of the therapy. I could be in the middle of a frightening panic attack and my mother would sit me down, out would come the massage oil and she would begin a session of reflexology on my feet. After only a few moments into the reflexology session I would feel my mind and body begin to relax. By the end of the session I would feel noticeably more calm, relaxed and my mood had improved. I know for a fact, if it hadn't been for my gorgeous mother offering me these sessions of reflexology I could possibly have ended up in hospital. I am eternally grateful to my mum for offering me this therapy. I made an amazing recovery and I totally believe reflexology played a significant role in my recovery.

Anyone who has experienced any form of anxiety, depression, panic attacks or stress will understand how welcoming a period of relaxation can be.

I continue to hold a strong interest and passion for reflexology. I have since completed a level one course on reflexology at the Holistic School of Reflexology in Christchurch. There are often short courses on reflexology offered in all regions of New Zealand. Through my basic knowledge of reflexology, my children, family and friends have all experienced the fantastic benefits of reflexology. It has been a gift I have even been able to offer some terminally ill friends over the years.

My dream would be to see reflexology being offered to all patients in psychiatric wards throughout New Zealand, who are experiencing periods of extreme stress, anxiety or depression. It is already offered as a complementary therapy in hospices throughout New Zealand.

The health benefits of a reflexology treatment are so beneficial, reducing greatly any feelings of distress, anxiety, everyday stress & strain or nervousness of any kind. Whilst wholly relaxing, you're being holistically treated receiving all physical and physiological benefits of pure relaxation. Who wouldn't want to experience that!

Louise Brown

(Louise will be talking about how reflexology helped her in an upcoming SOAR workshop.)



Women's Group is held on the last Friday of every month. This is a friendly informal meeting giving an opportunity for women to make new friends, and share experiences.

Next group will be on 26th June 2015

1-3pm meet at our rooms, Queens Building, 109 Princes Street.

(Image borrowed from Awakening 360 Womens Group)

SOAR Wellbeing Workshop Series

Melissa from Otago Polytechnic and the Otago Mental Health Support Trust are running a series of free workshops about free services available in the community to support your wellbeing. Each presentation is only one hour long. The first 6 will be on Brief Intervention Service, Green Prescription, Volunteering Otago, The Kowhai counselling Centre, A personal experience of how Reflexology has been helpful and a personal experience of the benefits of mindfulness. These sessions are available to anyone who currently accesses a mental health service. Please see the enclosed flyer for details.

Mindfulness

You may be aware that *mindfulness* is fast becoming one of the most highly respected psychological techniques for improving mental and physical health. Grant and Louise are currently involved with a particular mindfulness training called Palouse Mindfulness. This course, including resources, can be found at <http://www.palousemindfulness.com/>. The course is completely free and resources can be downloaded free.

Dave Potter runs the site. The following is taken from his website:

"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment..." - Jon Kabat-Zinn

"For most of us, when this happens, it's unexpected, maybe while walking on a mountain trail on a crisp autumn day, or being so focused in work or play that you are not thinking about past or future, or connecting with someone in a way that makes it seem like time is standing still. This state of being alive and whole in the present moment is always available, but it typically eludes us, especially in times of difficulty and external pressures."

Learning mindfulness

The programmes and materials available through the Palouse site are designed to help you experience mindfulness more consistently in life, work and relationships.

Grants story: I have completed some of the Palouse mindfulness programme and I can point to the Body Scan exercise as being one that has made a difference for me. This is where you listen to a downloaded voice going through an exercise of focusing on your breathing whilst also noticing the sensations in your body – from your feet through to your head. I most often did this 20 minute exercise in the morning before work. I felt calmer through the exercise and after as well. As a result I felt more focussed at work and more relaxed!

Louise's story: Completing the Palouse Mindfulness Stress Reduction course has been life changing for me. I now have a mindful awareness in my daily experiences for e.g. when I am going for a walk or even eating a meal. In our busy lives a lot of people are living mindlessly not mindfully and our minds are in the future or the past, so in the process we are not living in the moment. I particularly liked the sitting meditation and was surprised to learn that mindfulness meditation is not about getting rid of our thoughts but observing them as they come into our mind, being aware when our mind wanders and bringing attention back to our breathing. I highly recommend this course and know it will increase your ability to cope with stress and the challenges of everyday life.

Bipolar Support Group for people living with Bipolar disorder. Your family, whanau and friends are most welcome too. Anyone interested please come and join us, first Tuesday every month, 1pm to 3pm.

Next meeting Tuesday July 7th 1pm to 3pm

Otago Mental Health Support Trust rooms, 3rd Floor, Queens Building
109 Princes Street (above the Black Dog Café)

For more information phone us on 477 2598 or 0800 364 462