

Chapter 18

**Complementary Care**

**Overview**

Complementary care is care that is given alongside Western medical treatment and is used to enhance well-being and improve the effect of medical treatment. Many types of complementary care are available. In the African setting, where most families affected by HIV would not have funding to pay for complementary therapy, some complementary therapies can be taught to family members and Community Caregivers. For example, in a rural programme in Uganda the Community Caregivers have been taught reflexology to relieve their patients' stress. As it is impossible to list all available complementary therapies, this chapter describes some of those that are being used in African settings that may be effective in the palliative care of people with HIV/AIDS.

'Complementary therapies are used to control symptoms and enhance quality of life. They are promoted neither as cures for disease nor to be used in lieu of mainstream therapy. Rather, complementary therapies are applied in an adjunctive fashion to reduce pain and other symptoms. They are non-invasive, comforting, effective, and inexpensive'. (Cassileth, 2004)

Complementary therapies, when used competently and with sensitivity, can enhance the quality of the patient's life and help the family. Family members can be taught complementary techniques such as massage and play therapy, which strengthens inter-personal bonds and helps the family members feel that they are doing something to help their loved one.

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## Complementary Care, Western Medicine, and Traditional Medicine

It is important to differentiate between complementary therapies and traditional medicine and to specify how they each relate to Western medicine.

### *Complementary Care*

Within the field of western medicine, the general term complementary medicine refers to therapies that are used alongside western medical care to enhance the well-being of the patient. The term alternative medicine refers to a number of 'ancient systems of healing ... based on concepts of human physiology that differ from those understood by modern science' (Cassileth, 2004). The term alternative medicine is also used for any therapy that the patient chooses to use instead of, rather than along with, western medicine.

### *Traditional Medicine*

In the African context, and in this book, traditional medicine refers to the ancient systems of healing practiced within African cultures by indigenous practitioners who have been trained in these systems. For a full discussion, see Chapter 15: Traditional Medicine. Traditional healers and other traditional practitioners are professionals who have been trained in the traditions and who practice within the community alongside western-trained medical providers. Patients and families may seek the services of traditional healers in addition to or instead of western medical practitioners.

### *Western Medicine*

The term is used in this book to describe the system of healing that has developed within Western culture that is based on concepts of modern science. It includes medicine as practiced by trained and licensed physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals.

### *Difference Between Complementary Care and Traditional Medicine*

Complementary care usually refers to therapies adopted by Western medical practitioners to enhance and support the well being of the patient, especially in palliative care. Many of the techniques have been borrowed from ancient systems of healing within other cultures, such as Reiki, a Japanese tradition. However, they have usually been imported into other cultures and are practiced separate from their original cultures. Traditional medicine, on the other hand, refers to healing practices that are indigenous to the cultures in which they are being practiced. The theoretical systems on which they are based are therefore inherent in the culture and beliefs of the people seeking treatment.

### Advice to Caregivers

When using complementary therapies it is important to make certain they are culturally and spiritually acceptable to the person with HIV and the family. Also, it is important that the person's medical provider knows about the complementary therapies being used if there is any chance they may interact with medical therapies. Some herbal or homeopathic remedies may affect medications being prescribed. For example, St Johns Wort has been found to decrease the levels of some antiretroviral medications (Edmunds-Ogbuokiri, 2003).

Children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS often lack stimulation at home because their parents are ill. A combination of complementary therapies that stimulate the senses, such as aromatherapy, massage, and the use of music and colours, may promote their sensory development. Simple multi-sensory toys can be made from cloth of different texture, lights, and musical instruments. Children respond well to complementary therapies, which may also be helpful to the family or guardians and the caregiver.

### Therapies to Stimulate the Patient

#### *Aromatherapy*

Aromatherapy is the art and science of using essential oils to balance, relax, and stimulate the body, mind, and spirit. Aromas often recall memories of the past and as such may release emotions from past experiences. The oils may be used in a massage of the whole body or a part such as the hands, infused into a warm bath, or used as part of an inhalation or to fragrance a room. Each oil has a specific effect on the person. Lavender oil can be used to relieve stress and to relax the person, eucalyptus oil to relieve coughing and congestion, and lemongrass to be a stimulant.

***'The way to health is to have an aromatic bath and scented massage every day'.***

– Hippocrates

#### *Colour Therapy*

Colour therapy uses colours to stimulate, energize, or relax the patient. The colours may be in the person's clothing or in the room. It is thought that yellow stimulates the mind and the emotions; blue and green are calming and relaxing; red is energizing

#### *Pet Therapy*

This makes use of animals to comfort patients and help them relax. A gentle, older animal that is comfortable with people should be used. Dogs and cats are the most commonly used pets but people may also enjoy watching the antics of a variety of other animals and birds.

## Creative Therapies

### *Art Therapy*

Art therapy allows the person to express emotions and fears that they may not be able to express in words. Adults as well as children enjoy drawing and the use of colours. Much may be read into what has been created, but where possible, it is best to get the person to describe and interpret the picture.

Art therapy is often used with children. The decrease in the use of bright colours, which children usually favour, may indicate decreased physical and emotional energy. Children who are terminally ill often show common features in their art work. Objects on the page tend to move toward the upper left-hand quadrant of the page. The child often uses pictures to depict rain, clouds, or snow to indicate that they are feeling overwhelmed. A shining sun is often depicted shining nearby — a sign of hope. Changes in body image may be shown in the figures that are drawn by children.

### *Music and Dance Therapy*

Music offers the opportunity for creative acts. Group music and/or dance therapy promotes socialization and the understanding that one is not the only person who is ill and that expressions of fears and concerns are shared. Music has a powerful effect on the emotions, and may relax or energise the person. Techniques such as songwriting, putting new words to a familiar tune or song, and visualization through music or guided imagery, may encourage a person to release his or her fears through a creative and therapeutic act.

Older children and adults may express their sexuality through dance and through the words they put to music.

### *Play Therapy*

Children communicate through play. They use imaginary thinking to animate their toys and puppets. Thus play is a very effective tool to use when communicating with a child in any setting. Play in the home setting can identify problems within that setting. Some specific ideas include: puppets to communicate with the child, soft toys to comfort, balls to make a safe and non-threatening link between the child and the provider, board games to promote expression of feelings, anger and fear, and team games with other children to help the child to socialize. See Chapter 29: Psychosocial and Spiritual Care for more on play therapy.

## **Touch and Energy Therapies**

### *Massage and Therapeutic Touch*

Massage makes use of the hands to stimulate and relax the body and the mind. Oils may be used at the same time and it may be combined with aromatherapy. Children respond well to the effect of touch.

Therapeutic touch uses the dynamic energy field around the body to facilitate healing of the body, mind, and spirit.

### *Reflexology*

Reflexology is a natural healing art based on the principle that there are reflexes in the hand and feet that correspond to every part of the body. Stimulating and applying pressure to the feet or hands increases the circulation and promotes specific bodily and muscular functions. The therapeutic effect of touch enhances the reflexology treatment. Some people are very sensitive to having their feet touched or it may not be seen as culturally acceptable in all cultures. In these cases reflexology on the hands may be more acceptable. Community caregivers can be taught reflexology, as it has no cost implications whatsoever after the initial training.

### *Reiki*

Reiki is a Japanese form of natural healing based on the application of the Universal Life Force Energy. The hands are used above the body to link this energy to the body.

## Other Examples of Complementary Therapies

### *Homeopathy*

Homeopathy is a system of medicine based on three main principles.

1. Like cures like. If your common cold has the symptoms of mercury poisoning, the mercury will be used in the medication to cure the cold.
2. The Single Dose theory provides for one remedy for all the symptoms shown.
3. Homeopathic drugs are considered to be safe as they contain natural ingredients. They work with the immune system and do not further suppress it, they are not addictive, and the effect is holistic.

Herbal remedies are often used in homeopathy. Because of the manner of working of homeopathic medications, they may take longer to show an effect.

### *Prayer*

The naming of this as a complementary therapy is controversial, but in many parts of Africa this is seen as the greatest form of support for the individual and a way of bringing a peaceful acceptance of the illness and the progression, both for the patient and for the family members. Faith plays a very strong role in the lives of many people of Africa. (See Chapter 16: Spiritual and Cultural Care.)

### *Psycho-neuro-immunology*

This practice is based on the understanding that stress suppresses the immune system. Stress affects most if not all of the neuro-endocrine functions. People with HIV/AIDS often have many fears and concerns that cause stress. When they have their stress relieved through therapies such as reflexology and aromatherapy, this may have a positive effect on the immune system.

A form of stress relief that has been shown to be effective is the identification of a wish, goal, or dream for the patient. The wish may be to celebrate an upcoming holiday or to see a loved one again. Once this is granted, it gives the person something to look forward to, to then enjoy, and to remember with delight. This seems to have an immune-boosting effect. Any activity that promotes hope would seem to have a similar effect.

## References

Cassileth BR, Schulman G. 2004. Complementary therapies in palliative medicine. In: Doyle D, Hanks G, Cherny N and Calman K, eds. *Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine, 3rd edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Edmunds-Ogbuokiri J. 2003. Pharmacologic Interactions of Clinical Significance. In: O'Neill JF, Selwyn PA, Schietinger H, eds. *A Clinical Guide to Supportive & Palliative Care for HIV/AIDS*. Rockville MD: Health Resources and Services Administration.

## Suggested Resources

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