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Alternative medicine makes its mark

Complementary types of medicine can often be offered alongside more conventional NHS treatments and make a highly rewarding career for those who want to help others, but without working in a traditional role. By Niki Chesworth

IF YOU have migraines or chronic pain, your GP may recommend acupuncture. For a sports injury or a bad back, you might seek out an osteopath, and if you want to give up smoking or lose weight, then hypnotherapy might be the solution. Alternative health treatments are big business in the UK – with an estimated spend of as much as £5.4 million a year. Although this is dwarfed by the NHS budget, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) are often offered as part of conventional medical treatments.

The most common ones that may be offered through the NHS – for example, through a private practitioner such as a physiotherapist or in a clinic at your local GP surgery – are acupuncture, aromatherapy, chiropractic, homeopathy, massage, osteopathy and clinical hypnotherapy.

There are several homeopathy hospitals in Britain including the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine in Great Ormond Street, which accepts funded referrals, with about £5 million of the NHS budget being spent on these treatments each year.

However, most CAM practitioners are neither NHS-funded nor regulated by statute. That means individuals need to seek out qualified and regulated practitioners themselves, and those wanting to work in these roles need to be suitably trained and registered with the relevant professional body.

CHIROPRACTOR OR OSTEOPATH

These two professions are subject to statutory regulation, with practitioners required to gain recognised qualifications from providers registered by the General Chiropractic Council (gcc-uk.org) or General Osteopathic Council (osteopathy.org.uk).

Osteopaths generally gain a degree in osteopathy or a master's degree, although there are also courses with accelerated pathways for doctors and physiotherapists. Degree courses, which include anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology, nutrition and biomechanics, also include at least 1,000 hours of clinical training.

The Royal College of Chiropractors (rcc-uk.org) has more than 1,500 UK members with a requirement to have a master's-level qualification, although a GCC-accredited degree is all that is required to practice.

Is it for you? If you like the idea of helping to control pain or prevent injuries



Healing touch: complementary therapy practices range from Reiki, reflexology and acupuncture to non-contact healing

happening again, then these could be the jobs for you. Chiropractors and osteopaths need a highly developed sense of touch and need to be physically fit.

Pay: Most osteopaths and chiropractors are self-employed and can charge up to £50 for a treatment lasting about 30 to 45 minutes.

ACUPUNCTURE

This may be offered by healthcare professionals such as physiotherapists, or by private practitioners. The British Acupuncture Council (acupuncture.org.uk) keeps a voluntary register of those who have been accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.

Acupuncture is increasingly part of mainstream treatments, particularly for pain, with courses accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (baab.co.uk) taught to honour

degree level and including at least 400 hours in a clinical setting. Graduates can then join the British Acupuncture Council. London South Bank University, for example, offers a BSc in Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

Is it for you? Once again it is important to want to work directly with patients. And, of course, you have to be happy working with needles.

Pay: Most acupuncturists are self-employed and charge between £30 and £60 for an initial consultation and up to £50 for treatment.

HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathic hospitals do exist and, despite the debate of the effectiveness of treatments, the NHS does refer and pay for them.

The Faculty of Homeopathy (facultyofhomeopathy.org) offers internationally recognised training pathways and

the Society of Homeopaths (homeopathy-soh.org) registers homeopaths in the UK (with this register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority). Recognised courses are equivalent to a first degree and are part-time and last three to four years.

Is it for you? A strong belief in the effectiveness of homeopathic remedies is a must, along with interpersonal skills.

Pay: Homeopaths work for themselves and can charge up to £60 for an initial consultation and £45 thereafter.

HYPNOTHERAPY

This is a mainstream therapy and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends hypnosis for irritable bowel syndrome. GP surgeries may also refer patients for hypnotherapy to help them to quit smoking. The National Hypnotherapy Society (nationalhypnotherapy.org)

Acceptance growing for holistic form

"COMPLEMENTARY therapy has become normalised and widely accepted, rather than being considered akin to witchcraft, as aspects of it once were," says Sue Knight, chief executive of the charity, the Confederation of Healing Organisations.

"It's the world's oldest form of treatment – complementary therapy complements mainstream healthcare.

"Healing, within complementary therapy, works holistically on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. Typical practices range from Reiki, reflexology and acupuncture massage to non-contact healing, among many others.

"With the wider recognition of wellbeing in both home life and, more recently, in the workplace. There's been a significant increase in careers in the various disciplines of complementary therapy from people of all ages and walks of life."

Internationally renowned energy healer Douglas Ballard (douglasballard.com) operates out of Canary Wharf and works with business people, royalty and celebrities, among others.

He says: "Being a full-time healer has been the most rewarding experience of my life. I get to help people suffering every aspect of the human condition.

"I help them through their dilemmas, pass on the healing energy, enabling relief to achieve vitality and wellbeing.

"The most typical issues facing my clients include stress, back pain, migraines, asthma and numerous other problems, with the emotional stress they bring.

"Some of the more fascinating healing milestones I've achieved over the years has been treating children with autism, which left them in a more attentive state."

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runs a register which is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority and also provides information on training providers.

Training usually results in a diploma or certificate, with the Contemporary College of Therapeutic Studies (contemporarycollege.com) offering integrated courses in hypnotherapy, neuro-linguistic programming, psychotherapy and counselling.

The British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis (bscah.com) also offers information on training.

Is it for you? You need to have a natural aptitude and must be confident and calm.

Pay: This can be higher than for other complimentary therapies but clients only come for one or two visits, so there is often little ongoing treatment to provide a regular income. Hypnotherapists can charge £100 an hour.