

## WHY CAN'T WE 'TREAT' OUR 'PATIENTS' WITH REFLEXOLOGY?

In this investigative feature, reflexologist, teacher and author, Lee Anthony Taylor offers an invaluable insight into why this thorny issue has not yet been resolved, and how it might one day reach a satisfactory conclusion.

When examining the title of this feature, it is not a question of whether reflexology is effective but more about what *words* are acceptable to use to describe its effectiveness. Furthermore, and possibly more significantly, the use of these words defines the status that reflexologists have in the therapeutic process. The aim of this feature is to encourage discussion on the need for parity, and to recognise the need for increased scrutiny within the reflexology profession.

For words have power and create a symbolic meaning by their particular and specific usage. They can be used as weapons. It is frowned upon for us as reflexologists to use the words 'treat' and 'patient' when giving reflexology by both those inside and outside of the profession. But why is that? And why would it be considered acceptable if a nurse, who has qualified in reflexology, refers to the people s/he works with as 'patients'?

The answer lies in the status afforded to those words within those professions. It can be argued that only the medical profession has the 'right' to use those words, since their several years of medical training beats a reflexology course hands down and commands respect for the time devoted to job preparation.

It would appear totally inappropriate and almost insulting to categorise a newly-qualified reflexologist in the same group as a newly-qualified doctor. And quite rightly so, I hear some of you say. A doctor is bound by many rules and conventions all designed to protect the people they work with. The perception is that all of those years of training have made him or her better at meeting the needs of patients. It has become an accepted standard.

Complementary medicine (CM), which includes reflexology, has only relatively recently been classed as an industry and provided professions for lay people. Its aim, as the name suggests, has been to work alongside existing practices, offering alternatives to those who are not entirely happy with orthodox medicine. This quiet, methodical approach has led to a blossoming success as more and more people return to use CM as a therapy of choice.

What possibly has not been addressed quickly enough is regulation within complementary medicine to weed out the 'quacks' and to present a more credible and accountable profession to the general public. Until that time, it will not be possible to use the same words and have the same status.

But how far should regulation go? If our ultimate aim is to be equal to doctors, then we have to face the same level of scrutiny and go through the same processes of accountability. At the moment, unregistered reflexologists exist everywhere and there are some who are not properly qualified calling themselves reflexologists. How do we bring them into the fold, so they are both recognised and accountable? The dilemma here is that, by such an action, it could have an excluding effect, forcing many to leave the profession.

As reflexologists, we do nothing to enhance our credibility either. In our promotional literature, we talk about 'facilitating' a healing process rather than directly inputting into the situation, like when an osteopath manipulates your spine to free you from physical pain.

We seem to take a step back and attribute the success of reflexology to the willingness of the person to heal themselves. Is it no wonder the rest of the world is confused about our role? But if you look at the work of an osteopath, they are highly regulated in a similar way to those in the general medical profession. So, we have to ask ourselves, do we want freedom to practise without tight restriction or heavier regulation with possibly more recognition?

I am all about offering solutions even though this situation does not look like resolving itself any time soon. So, forgetting about definitions and semantics, we need to focus our attention on what is really important here. Is it the continuing squabble over who can use what words, or is it the need for growing acceptance that reflexologists and all CM practitioners have an integral role to play in healthcare provision?

Let us look past the language for the moment and see the bigger picture. Whether we 'offer sessions' to our 'clients' or 'treat' our 'patients' is irrelevant here, it is a distraction from the central issue. We have a job to do, we are trained professionals with excellent standards, and we have a commitment to lending our expertise to help people get better. That is where our power truly lies.

There is a way to promote our therapy without antagonising the medical profession. It is through slow and methodical social acceptance. It has to start at the grassroots level. A way to become integrated into the mainstream health service is to convert your family and friends and make them reliant on coming to you for assistance when dealing with a health crisis. It's all through word of mouth and recommendation.

We will never replace doctors and their invaluable expertise is paramount when dealing with health emergencies. But, if this pandemic of 2020 has taught us anything, it is that we have had to become more self-reliant as access to medical care has been severely restricted.

It may take many generations, but the change has to start with our children, so they grow up accepting energy medicine as the therapy of choice.

It doesn't matter if it is considered wrong to label 'treatments' and 'patients' as such. We have to bypass the politics and look to the real reason for practising our therapy – to help people to help themselves.

The reflexology associations can play their part in raising the profile of reflexology by publishing more and more testimonials from real people, rather than research results which cynics will never believe anyway. Remember, it's all through word of mouth and recommendation.

If we are talking about the power of words, it is through anecdote, story and testimonial that the real benefits of reflexology will be presented to a curious world. The best way to neutralise the power struggle and eliminate the 'us' and 'them' situation is to do our job and do it well – helping each person we work with one foot at a time.