

# The complementary partnership

Sarah McNamee talks to Alison Turner

**Y**ou need more than one tool in your toolkit," Alison tells me with a smile. As an aromatherapist, Reiki practitioner and former nurse it's easy to see how she has used this mantra. From early in her nursing career she looked into other ways of healing the mind as well as the body of the patient. "I became aware of things patients would try themselves, old wives remedies and advice from friends and neighbours. Conventional medicine was forgetting about its natural roots and I was interested in what else I could do for patients."

Alison passed all her school qualifications at 16 but to study nursing in 1970s Britain one had to be 17 and a half. "I don't know what that extra six months was supposed to do! I was impatient to get started but had to wait and work in an office for over a year. I wanted to learn about people as well as help them. Although nursing begins by healing the physical, it should lead to an examination of the psychological and psychiatric. The mind is linked to the spiritual, and I came to believe that healing the mind was just as important as healing the body."

She particularly remembers one day during her nursing training, there was a really upset lady on the ward. The trainees were supposed to clean if it was quiet. Instead, Alison pulled the curtain around the bed, sat beside the lady and gave her a big hug. She didn't have to do anything except stroke her back and listen to her worries. The patient just needed to let it out, to talk and have someone listen and care.

"Sometimes in nursing I felt like my hands were tied behind my back – it was all procedures and instruments, and boxes to tick. Touch wasn't encouraged and although massage used to be a nursing task it had become the responsibility of physiotherapists. Aromatherapy and Reiki are now generally accepted in hospitals, usually in palliative care, but are not always available to the majority of patients. Massage and aromatherapy gave me an outlet for my belief in the need for touch in healing.

"I always took a patient history before giving aromatherapy treatments, but there were usually a few aches and pains that were forgotten about. When I was massaging I could sometimes feel my hands buzzing, with pins and needles, over these areas and when I asked my client they would say, 'Oh yeah I had forgotten about that bit!' I think that healing is a sharing of energy and that true care and motivation to help someone opens a connection. Being tuned in to Reiki makes this energy always available, meaning it is there permanently, and it doesn't depend on attaining the 'state of the healer' all the time, which would be mentally exhausting!"

Alison was working in family planning when a fellow nurse, and aromatherapist, invited her to an 'alternative health fair'. Looking at the posters advertising talks given by practitioners, one line particularly grabbed her attention and she felt she had to hear the speaker. "I still remember her name was Julie Heavens – it felt like a sign! The poster said that Reiki 'heals the healer at the same time'. Nursing requires huge amounts of your own energy and it can be physically and emotionally draining. I was very attracted to the idea of something that supported the carer. When I attended the talk, Reiki seemed so lovely and gentle, and very flexible, so I went home and began to look into learning this interesting healing art.

"I felt so drawn to Reiki that I booked my First Degree course for that same month. I was the only person on the weekend who had

never had a Reiki treatment. I don't think I had even seen it being given – that must be pretty unusual! When I met my Reiki masters, Kate and Alec Jones, I was put instantly at ease. I loved them straight away; they felt so familiar and warm. The weekend was so special in bringing together a group of people who would otherwise probably not have mixed. The class was taught by telling stories, and each member of the group had a different story to tell."

“ Reiki seemed so lovely and gentle ”

When Alison saw the changes in people from the beginning to the end of the Reiki weekend, she felt the urge to share her experience and encourage others to learn. She hosted Reiki weekends for Kate and Alec, sometimes two a year, and more than 100 people have learned so far. People have kept in touch through sharing nights, although Alison wishes she had time for more. "Life changes, and unfortunately I've become too busy to host shares, as I work in medical research in hospitals all over the country. Now I offer Reiki to anyone I come across in my working or personal life. I give treatments to those who I feel may be in need, but I don't have a formal practice. I learned Second Degree so I could send Reiki to people and situations when I don't have time to go to them in person. On my first business trip away from home after my initiation, my four year old asked me on the phone if I had sent her Reiki the night before, as she'd felt my hands on her!

"One of the things that drew me to aromatherapy and Reiki was that I was able to give so much more time and attention to each individual because I wasn't always rushing towards my next appointment slot. It's a shame I don't have enough time to practice Reiki now, because touch is so important in forging connections, to enable or support healing. Reiki allows the 'patient' to take what they need in whatever setting; it facilitates healing both in and outside of a hospital environment. When I was a young nurse alternative therapies were scoffed at and dismissed. Acceptance of, and referrals to, complementary therapies is wonderful. It's great to see conventional medicine partnered with holistic health and I'm glad to have witnessed that change." □  
Alison Turner is based in Scotland.