Pill-Free Clinic Relieves Pain
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HEALTH

# Pill-Free Clinic Relieves Pain

## Tough testimony extols the body as its own best doctor

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I have osteoporosis. For a great many years I have tried to quietly live with this debilitating disease, but unfortunately, it has grown steadily worse. When the pain became intolerable, I started taking pain-killers.

About two months ago, I took twice my prescribed dosage by mistake and the results were disastrous. After that terrible experience, I began looking seriously at "alternative medicine." That's when I learned about the National Institute of Naturopathy in Pune, Maharashtra. Although this institute was far from my home in Delhi, I made the trip without hesitation.

I arrived late one afternoon. My treatment began the following morning. After six sessions spread over three days, I was able to sleep without painkillers. After two weeks, I returned home transformed. It was such a wondrous experience, I want to share it with everyone.

The National Institute of Naturopathy (NIN) is located on ten acres of land at Bapu Bhawan in Pune, about 100 miles from Mumbai. Four doctors, eight interns and 20 trainees work there six days a week to serve approximately 175 patients a day. Funded only by modest patient fees and a small government grant, NIN services

and accommodations are far from luxurious, even though they do include a full range of traditional naturopathic treatments, complimented by yoga classes and acupressure.

NIN records show that in the 1930s, Mahatma Gandhi spent 156 days at this place during seven visits. He was a staunch believer in naturopathy. "The human body is a living temple of God and a miraculous machine, " said Gandhi in defense of the medical system. "It is self-reliant in maintaining health, as well as in curing disease through the medicines produced in its own factory."

Naturopathy is a system of physical therapy that utilizes natural remedies in treating illness. Naturopathic doctors strive to treat even acute or chronic illness by simply allowing or helping rather than hindering the body as it attempts to work with physical problems in its own way. The fundamental principals of this approach are: regulated daily routine; occasional fasting; a vegetarian diet; hatha yoga; and the strict avoidance of indiscriminate medication, cigarette smoking or excessive consumption of tea, coffee, drugs or alcohol. Hydrotherapy, chromotherapy, mud baths and massage are also utilized to assist the body in the healing process. Hydrotherapy (water treatment) features cold compresses, as well as sitz, spinal, immersion and steam baths. Chromotherapy (color treatment) includes sun baths and exposure of certain areas of the body to colored lights.

"We should be able to live healthy lives naturally, like birds and animals, " asserts Dr. B.T. Murthy, the current director of the institute. "The science of living naturally has been lost to humans for some time." Murthy went on to explain that the British brought to India the attitude that allopathic medicines exclusively could cure all ailments.

Asked about the feasibility of applying long-term techniques without ongoing professional assistance, Murthy said, "After diagnosis and some training, almost all treatments can be carried on at home, some with help from family members. But knowledge is a must. The treatment is a learning process. Sometimes an old patient is worth more than a young doctor."

Dr. Murthy emphasized that the body is made of five elements--earth, air, fire, water and ether--and that the proper balance of these elements indicates good

health, while an imbalance indicates the opposite. His parting words to me were, "In today's world, there is a medicine-bound mania. Self-medication is the order, and the last resort is desperate prayer to God Almighty. In our discipline, we start with demedication and detoxification, and let the body do the rest."

Dr. Chander Shekhar, another doctor at the clinic, offered these insights, "The body has remarkable recuperative powers. We can treat any condition if it is referred to us during early stages--even severe illnesses like cancer, epilepsy, diabetes, obesity, arthritis and polio." Shekhar emphasized, however, that the patient must do his part. He or she must think positively and learn to be calm.

When I brought up the subject of aging with Dr. Shekhar, he said, "Old age is a natural process and not a disease. In aging, as in living, mental attitude, poise, proper diet, regular exercise and ample water intake continue to be important."

After three days of treatment, I was referred to Satyajeet Biswas, the yoga teacher at NIN. Biswas explained that--especially in the treatment of arthritis, nervous disorders, stress, tension, pain in joints and respiratory disorders like asthma--hatha (physical) yoga and pranayama (breath control) are effective in enhancing other naturopathic treatments.

Lastly I spoke with Dr. Abhishek Jain, one of the doctors who treated me. When I asked him specifically about diseases that could not be treated by naturopathy, he clarified that in cases of a neurological or structural abnormality, like cerebral palsy, other systems might be more helpful. He did say, however, that with mental retardation, naturopathy can help.

He also emphasized the importance of the unseen or spiritual side of the treatment. It is our job to set the proper physical controls in place, he exclaimed. Then the nonphysical forces can have their best effect.

While I was at the institute, I had the good fortune to interview a few people who were as enthusiastic about their treatment as I was about mine. Their testimonies speak for themselves.

Ram Dular Sharma is a retired Engineer. At age 70--just one year ago--he had a number of health problems. For years he had tried allopathic medicines. Nothing worked. After experimenting with a variety of "alternative treatments, " he ordered a "miracle cure " by mail. Instead of bringing him relief, it made his condition worse. One thing after another he tried. Finally, desperation set in. Nothing was helping. His pain was excruciating and he could not sleep. He even told me that he was considering suicide. In February of 2003, he learned about NIN and came in for a checkup. The doctor who first met with him immediately advised a complex regime of treatment, including strict vegetarian dietary controls. After 40 days, Sharma no longer suffered from pain, and his overall condition was greatly improved. Today, he is off all medicines, lives at home in Pune and visits the institute only occasionally. He is fully recovered and considers the whole experience nothing short of wondrous.

Sujata Upadhaya was living with painful rheumatoid arthritis. "I was in such great agony, " she lamented. "The ailment started only a year and a half ago with nothing more than some minor discomfort in my ankle. In six months this condition had degenerated so rapidly that I was almost immobilized.

"By that time I was also suffering from typhoid and some other infections. I began ayurvedic treatment, but there was absolutely no relief--not even a proper diagnosis. I started taking strong allopathic drugs. Nothing was working.

"There I was--39 years old, helpless and completely bedridden. Although I have a doctorate in medicine, I had no idea what was wrong with me. My knees had swollen to the size of footballs. I was in constant pain. In addition to everything else, I had a mental breakdown. My life was totally shattered. And the future looked very dark indeed. I retreated into a shell, surviving only by the grace of strong family support.

"The very first week of my stay here was marvelous. Slowly I improved. I was off painkillers in seven days. In a month, I was back at work.

"Before coming here, I contemplated taking my own life. When doctors tell a doctor that a disease has no cure and nothing can be done, it is really scary. But the physicians at NIN gave me confidence that I could recover. Now, I am a woman

transformed. I am strong, optimistic and leading a normal life. Normal? Actually, it's a miracle."

Prabha Prabhakar Bhardwaj is a freelance journalist who lives with her husband outside New Delhi. For more information on NIN contact the National Institute of Naturopathy, Bapu Bhawan, Tadiwala Road, Pune 411 001, Maharashtra, India.