



TOUCH to TALK

Recognising how connected our minds and bodies really are, a new breed of therapists use the power of speech to enrich their body therapy offerings. **Amerley Ollennu** investigates

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Have you ever left the hairdressers with a renewed sense of purpose or walked out of a spa with an air of calm, feeling much happier than you did when you walked in? It's not just the result of the treatments you've had but what we've all been aware of for a long time – that our favourite beauty therapists can act as quasi-psychotherapists, proving the fusion between touch and talk can have profound effects. As the author Margaret Atwood wisely put

it: 'Touch comes before sight, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth.'

Imagine then that the therapist you're seeing doesn't just have an understanding of the body but of the mind as well. Dr Max Blumberg, research psychologist at Goldsmiths University London, believes 'nowadays there is a tendency for patients to want the "silver bullet treatment"; essentially this is a quick fix to all their problems. But for psychotherapy to work, the patient has

to make an emotional investment and getting them to commit can be difficult as it takes time. However, a holistic approach might help to speed up the process. Any relationship that involves touching means that you have already given someone permission to enter your personal space, making it easier to get things off your chest.'

This rapport is strengthened by oxytocin – the hormone released during relaxation and massage. It helps relieve stress and encourage bonding (it is also released during childbirth to help with parent-baby bonding) – which could be why these new forms of therapeutic treatments work so well.

Trusting touch

Masseur and psychotherapist Andrea Maria Lucas weaves together her understanding of the body and the psyche to redefine massage. Lucas feels 'alternative therapies often fail to consider mental and emotional health and talking therapies need to address the body' – her aim is to bridge the gap.

Lucas points out that there is much more going on than the needs of the muscle tissue, and that the physical, emotional, spiritual and energetic aspects need to be considered. She pays close attention to what her clients' bodies require. 'Our life experiences leave traces, which build up "armouring" in muscles and tissues as well as psychological defences. Depression, anxiety, intestinal disorders and headaches are all felt in the muscle tissue or fascia as tension or tight knots,' says Lucas.

As the body holds what the mind can't bear knowing and feeling, Lucas focuses her treatments on areas of tension, trying to unblock those areas in order to reconnect the energy flow, helping her clients complete their emotional cycle and create real improvement in the way they feel.

Dr Barbara Mariposa is another such

therapist. As a medical doctor and with a background in psychiatry, Mariposa knows the mind, but after suffering from depression, she went in search of alternatives to the traditional medical take on psychiatry.

She discovered Five Elements Acupuncture, in which body, mind and emotions are all regarded as part of one energetic system. Acupuncture needles are inserted in points that lie on energy channels, and are directly related to specific organs and physiological functions. The results include deep relaxation, pain relief, and healing. Having experi-

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enced the effects of this for herself, Mariposa trained as a Five Element acupuncturist and now combines it with her work as a mindfulness coach.

Like Lucas, Mariposa believes our emotions, physical health and mental health are all connected. There is only so much that you can do about this by exploring the intellect, Mariposa explains. 'What often occurs is that we tend to go round and round in the same old patterns and it doesn't matter how many insights one has into why we're doing what we're doing – it won't necessarily help you break down that habit'. So how do we make changes to our lives and move forward if talking only gets us

so far? Mariposa believes our bodies need to be considered when it comes to healing our minds.

Acupuncture is also an effective stress-busting treatment, as it intervenes in the stress response pathway to reduce cortisol levels, resulting in energetic shifts in the body that help us unwind. 'Being in this state of relaxation allows clients to slowly change their thinking, and their emotional sense of themselves,' explains Mariposa.

Positive change

So when, after one of the most stressful periods of my life, I found myself in need of something different, I turned up at Mariposa's door. Traditional therapy didn't seem to be getting to the core of my issues – I kept talking about my past and being told 'no, that's not the reason you feel and do the things you do'. I felt let down and, after waking up in the middle of the night every night for a week with pains in my chest, I was completely ready to try something new.

As I sat and talked to the doctor, she gave me her feedback, helping to quell my negativity. If I closed my eyes I could have been chatting to an insightful friend, but then what friend would be able to whip out their acupuncture needles and tap into my energy points to give me balance, too? I left the session with Barbara that day feeling much lighter and happier, and looking forward to the next one.

Whether you want to become more emotionally intelligent or you're not quite ready to talk about the way you feel, these fusion treatments may well bring you closer to the answer you've been looking for. And with no prescription pad in sight, they can't hurt.

For more information on Andrea Maria Lucas, visit andreamarialucas.co.uk
For more on Barbara Mariposa, visit drbarbamariposa.com