

I have based my presentation on an exploration of the words which describe what natural medicine has come to mean to me and how my journey has developed over the years. I began with a deep commitment to, and belief in, conventional medicine where natural medicine played no part at all in my life, and moved to a place where my automatic response to ill health is to look to natural medicine for assistance.

The first word to start my exploration of this concept is the word that epitomises where I began on my journey thirty years ago when I was a medical representative for Beechams. I spent my days talking to doctors about the benefits of using antibiotics and anti depressants and the key word that I remember of that period is the word **anti**. I sold and spoke warmly and enthusiastically about the bacteriocidal effect of Amoxil - delighting in the knowledge that it was capable of killing bacteria dead rather than simply suppressing their growth in the way that a bacteriostatic drug would do. The key benefit to me was powerful action and the promise of complete eradication of disease. I gave my support to the cause by regularly taking 3grams of Amoxil at the first sign of any illness !

I continued in the same way for years until I became a mother and faced the prospect of having to treat my children with drugs which stopped me in my tracks. That turning point leads me to think of the second word which reflects the desire I had to find another way to bring healing into my life and that of my family and that word is **gentleness**. That is not to say I saw natural medicine simply as a gentle alternative which might suggest I saw it as being ineffectual. That is far from the truth I consider natural medicine to have great potency and efficacy and that made me question why I see it that way when it is so often derided and criticised.

My feeling that natural medicine is powerful stems partly from the fact that it stimulates and activates inner resources and unseen forces over which we have no control and little knowledge. That is the aspect of natural healing that appeals to me the most because it is the unknown within each of us that excites me more as a healing power than the known.

I recognise that despite appearances the impact and effect of conventional medicine is unpredictable and often little understood but it seems to me that practitioners of natural medicine approach their patients from a different starting place where they begin by accepting that health and well being cannot be controlled and directed but rather that it can be stimulated and encouraged. This approach allows the thought process to meander as through a valley and draw upon intuition and sensibility of the subtleties and peculiarities that define our individuality rather than following the linear thought processes that tend to focus the mind on one track, one approach and one outcome. The effect is that the picture of the patient is softer and less defined at first and only comes into clearer focus gradually as the depth of understanding grows.

The recognition of the power of the body to heal itself caused me to think of the next word that defines my understanding of natural medicine and that is the word **Respect**. This word made me think about the way in which natural medicine works with the flow of energy in the body and also of the importance of recognising that mind and spirit are equal partners with the body in their impact on health. The approach of natural medicine is to integrate rather than separate so that there is awareness of the whole person at the heart of the healing process.

Conversely, one of the key problems in conventional medicine is that of separation of mind, body and spirit which so often leaves patients feeling uninvolved with their treatment and care.

The focus on the whole person caused me to think of the word **Compassion** and to consider why it is important to have compassion in order to heal. Compassion is connected with the concept of dis-ease and the need to restore peace to mind and body. Compassion is needed both for oneself and for others (because healing comes from right action towards self as much as it does from right action towards others) and it is linked to the awareness of the need to forgive ourselves, to allow what is to be what it is, to seek to understand and to accept rather than fight and object.

I then thought about what healing is seeking to achieve and the word **Harmony** came to mind. The central benefit of natural medicine is that it not only allows but also asks for my participation in the journey to health. It allows me to be a partner and a contributor in that journey rather than a passenger and a recipient.

Partnership in my healing process means that I am able to align my thinking and my energy with the power of the practitioner; to take responsibility for my health and well-being and to become one with the healing that is being given.

Finally, I thought of the word **Balance** which is the desired outcome in which the natural rhythm of the body is restored and stimulated to renew itself. I love the concept of renewal in the body and the idea that it is continually shedding the old and bringing in new energy and life.

As a patient I have experienced many different therapies including homeopathy, acupuncture, Chinese medicine, massage, cranial osteopathy to name a few, but at no time have I ever felt that I was harmed by the treatment I received or that I was irrelevant in the healing process. Conversely, my experience of conventional medicine has frequently left me feeling polluted, toxic, sluggish and more damaged from the side effects of medication than I was before the treatment began.

I recognise that there are times when we need to tackle disease in a radical, aggressive way but for me that would be reserved for extreme situations where my health was so seriously threatened that I would have to yield to intervention that otherwise I would try to avoid.

My respect for the healing power of natural medicine is profound and stems from the fact that I believe that my own healing resource can be stimulated rather than replaced and that the healing process can help me to cleanse, renew, revitalise and re-experience myself.

I began with the word ANTI which expressed my early attitude to medicine and realise that my commitment to natural medicine has had an uplifting, inspiring and beneficial effect on my life for which I am deeply grateful.