

My practice

In this new occasional feature **Harriet Robinson** interviews IFPA aromatherapists to find out what makes them tick. Here she talks to London-based aromatherapy practitioner Shelley Smith

Shelley Smith (pictured) is a clinical aromatherapist with a private practice in Wanstead, East London. She qualified in aromatherapy at the Institute of Traditional Herbal Medicine and Aromatherapy (ITHMA) in 2001 and has been an IFPA member for over 10 years, having previously been a member of the Register of Qualified Aromatherapists.

HR: Why did you decide to study aromatherapy?

SS: I was looking for a career change because I had worked in the City of London as a Personal Assistant (PA) for over 15 years and was ready for something new. I had always been interested in health and fitness and I'd had some aromatherapy treatment for tendonitis in my Achilles. It worked wonders! So, I decided I would like to train in aromatherapy.

HR: Why did you choose to study on an IFPA-accredited course?

SS: I trained pre IFPA but decided to study at ITHMA after reading good reports on the internet.

HR: How have you developed your career since graduation and what do you like about your aromatherapy practice?

SS: I combine my complementary therapy work with a PA job in central London. Mondays and Tuesdays I'm a PA, the rest of the week I'm an

aromatherapist working from home.

While building up my own private practice, I worked out of a couple of clinics for a time but I have worked solely from home for the past seven or eight years.

I have added acupuncture, acupressure and other massage therapies to my repertoire so that I can offer a more varied approach to suit the needs of each individual client.

Each modality has its own particular strength and I often use them in combination to produce more effective results. I love the interaction with clients and I find the work very rewarding. I also love the freedom of being self-employed.

HR: Can you tell us something about your special interests?

SS: I am interested in aromatherapy and fertility. There has been quite a bit of research into acupuncture and fertility and this has been very well marketed but there seems to be little research on aromatherapy for fertility.

I especially like working with pregnant clients and I usually treat them right through the pregnancy. During the first trimester I only use base oil and even after that I always check to make sure clients are happy for me to use a little essential oil - usually just two or three drops.

I use a combination of rose and ginger - my pregnant clients love that blend. The ginger is good for reliev-



ing nausea and boosting energy levels while the rose is relaxing, without sending them to sleep.

During the first two trimesters, clients can have a 60-minute full body massage. Later, or once they find it uncomfortable to lie on their back, they have the option of a 45- or 30-minute side-lying massage. I tend to keep the room cool as expectant mums are usually quite warm.

HR: What do you think are the benefits of being a member of the IFPA?

SS: I look forward to receiving the *In Essence* journal. Also I like the respect that being an IFPA member gives me and the quality of CPD training provided by IFPA colleges.

HR: What is your favourite essential oil and why?

SS: The oils I use change with the seasons. Right now my favourite oil is probably frankincense. It works well both in massage blends and in a burner. It's a gently warming oil that helps me relax.

HR: What was your worst aromatherapy moment?

SS: A lady contacted me via email about full body pregnancy massage, wishing to pay in advance for four treatments - total cost £200. Although I told her that clients usually pay on their first visit she said she would prefer to send a cheque in advance payment.

A couple of days later a £950 banker's draft arrived. I noticed from the envelope that it had been posted in Ireland and the signature and paper looked odd.

I contacted the bank but was unable to obtain information about the account holder and was told to take the draft into a branch of the bank.

When I contacted the client she

confirmed the draft was from her and asked me to deduct my fees from the £950 and send her a cheque for the balance.

My suspicions were immediately aroused - this sounded like money laundering. I informed her that I could not accept money in this way and blocked her email address from my contacts.

When I took the draft into the bank the staff confirmed that it was probably a fake and they would report the incident to their Fraud department. I hope this doesn't happen to any other therapists but they should be on the alert!

If you would like to contact Shelley please email shelleysmith5@yahoo.com or visit : www.shelleysmith.co.uk

■ We are looking for more IFPA members and student members, both in the UK and abroad, to share their love of aromatherapy. You may have your own practice, you may work from a clinic, or in a hospital or hospice, you may work with children, or you may practise aromatherapy as a volunteer.

Perhaps you combine your practice with another modality, or you would simply like to share something about your practice that you particularly enjoy - your favourite blend, a tip for other aromatherapists, a particular experience, or a success story. Or maybe, as a volunteer, you use your aromatherapy skills in a special way to help people?

If you have something you would like to share with your fellow IFPA members we would love to hear from you. Please contact *In Essence* editor Pat Herbert – contact details on page 3 - or email Harriet Robinson via info@sparklemore.com.

Harriet Robinson practises at Neal's Yard Remedies Covent Garden Clinic and from home, supports St Christopher's Hospice and offers study days and plant walks at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew for groups and students (see www.sparklemore.com).

Research notes

Iranian study

Can aromatherapy massage affect psychological symptoms in postmenopausal women? A recent Iranian study found that, although aromatherapy massage and massage both reduced psychological symptoms, the effect of aromatherapy massage was greater. Ninety women participated in the randomised trial, carried out by the Tehran University of Medical Sciences and the Tehran Research Institute for Islamic and Complementary Medicine. The aromatherapy massage group received twice-weekly 30-minute aromatherapy sessions with aroma oil for four weeks, the massage therapy group received the same treatment with odourless oil, and no treatment was given to the control group. More details on method and results at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23642946

Research on pre-menstrual emotional symptoms

Three Japanese research institutions recently collaborated on a randomised crossover trial to see if aromatherapy with *Lavandula angustifolia* could alleviate premenstrual emotional symptoms. Seventeen participants were examined on two separate occasions (aroma and control trials) in the late-luteal phases, and two kinds of aromatic stimulation (lavender and water as

a control) were used. Researchers measured heart rate variability reflecting autonomic nerve activity and the Profile of Mood States as a psychological index before and after aromatherapy. The results indicated that lavender aromatherapy could alleviate premenstrual emotional symptoms and that this is in part attributable to the improvement in parasympathetic nervous system activity. Full article at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=23724853

Understanding aromatherapy

Recent research at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China revealed metabolic changes in human volunteers after aroma inhalation for 10 continuous days. Metabolic alterations found in the urine of 31 women with mild anxiety symptoms, who were exposed to aerial diffusion of aromas, included a significant alteration of metabolic profile in subjects responsive to essential oil, and significant alteration in the metabolites from tricarboxylic acid cycle and gut microbial metabolism. It was concluded that this metabolomics approach can capture the subtle metabolic changes resulting from exposure to essential oils, which may lead to an improved mechanistic understanding of aromatherapy. Full article at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3659644