



Die Well

A Montreal AIDS hospice gets CAT-ty with aromatherapy and more *by Carole Durand*

FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, a Montreal AIDS hospice has been improving the quality of its residents' lives with complementary and alternative therapy (CAT). Maison d'Hérelle grew out of a pilot project originally supported by the City of Montreal and the Ministry of Social Services to help people with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) retain their independence. From the outset, in light of the limited medical means of the period, CAT was particularly welcomed and went a long way toward helping to instill hope in the residents, who initially had come simply to die with dignity. That's part of the mission of the hospice — to create an atmosphere that respects and honours each person's individuality as they live out their lives according to their own convictions, while also respecting the common well-being. And, so, it was primarily in response to residents' evolving needs that CAT was introduced.

The initial experimentation focused on massage therapy and the results proved conclusive. In addition to

creating a stronger bond between staff and residents, massage therapy helped lessen certain types of pain that didn't respond to medication. The comfort provided by touch also became an important part of the care. Improvements in both the physical and psychological well-being of residents, while sometimes only temporary, were observed as a result of this contact.

There has been steady progress in the development of complementary approaches at Maison d'Hérelle. In 1993, primarily because of my training in naturopathy and aromatherapy, I was hired to develop this discipline further. A committee was created to promote the development of CAT and to train staff and volunteers. In the beginning, we had to progress slowly in order to respect our coworkers' and the community's concerns about CAT. We had already introduced a few plant extracts, such as tinctures (made from a plant soaking in alcohol for some time to extract its active ingredients) and herbal tea infusions, to treat minor issues like digestive problems, colds and flus. Essential oils are highly concentrated substances that are very powerful, so we started off using them almost exclusively on the outside of the body for massages. Although we proceeded with caution, our colleagues often cast a skeptical glance in our direction...especially when they saw us apply cabbage compresses on bedsores to extract pus and aid in the healing process. *Mon Dieu!*

Herbal essence

Gradually Maison d'Hérelle became a reference point for Montreal PHAs interested in CAT; hospitals and local health community centres now frequently ask for our recipes. Through our use of CAT, we've obtained good results for many problems — from infectious diseases (herpes, bronchitis) to skin problems (dermatitis, rashes) to pain management. We've formulated our own recipes for aromatherapy tonics and herbal creams that can improve a person's well-being and help him or her deal with various AIDS-related problems. Already grappling with a wide range of medications, the residents see in these approaches an opportunity to regain some control over their health and reduce some of the undesirable effects they're experiencing — without having to take more pills.

The main approaches used by the hospice team are: phytotherapy (herbal therapy), aromatherapy (the art of healing with essential oils), homeopathy, nutritional supplementation, energy healing (such as therapeutic touch, Reiki and massage), art therapy, colour therapy and music therapy. These services are provided primarily by staff and volunteers. Four of the employees have specific training in CAT; they recommend different approaches to the residents as well as prepare aromatherapy and herbal mixtures. The other team members apply and provide the therapy to the residents. A reference book created by the committee with information on treatments available for different pathologies is used as a support tool for the team.

As a naturopath, the opportunity to develop and try out treatments that can benefit the residents is a privilege. Although I practice various approaches, I have a preference for *scientific* aromatherapy. More than simply a science of smells, this approach concerns the biochemical composition of aromatic plants and their physiological effects on humans. Although not appropriate for use in all situations, the results are often truly amazing when it comes to treating many kinds of infections, as well as regulating and rebalancing the body. Essential oils used in aromatherapy are administered on the skin via massage and can also be inhaled or taken orally (diluted in oil or in capsules). We also make suppositories for respiratory disease and problems related to the genital and anal area.

Now I'd like to let you experience the therapeutic effects of aromatherapy yourself with a couple of effective recipes I've tried with the hospice residents and my private-practice patients:

DO-IT-YOURSELF TONICS

These aromatherapy recipes are used frequently at Maison d'Hérelle and have proved excellent at increasing energy and reducing side effects that cause anergy (absence or lack of energy). These tonics are very concentrated, so use them carefully. Because of their strong effects, one must apply essential oils with a certain rigour and have some basic knowledge about them or ask for some professional support. Because essential oils are expensive, they are often diluted with solvents, so make sure to buy oils that are labeled with the Latin name and the chemotype. You can buy them at most health food stores.

Adrenal gland tonic – tonifies the adrenal glands, which is involved in stress reduction

- 5 ml *Picea Mariana*
- 5 ml *Pinus Sylvestris*


Mix together and rub 5–10 pure drops on the area of the adrenal glands (just above the kidneys; on your lower back) 2–3 times a day.

General tonic – works on different levels of fatigue to increase digestion, equilibrate the nervous system and increase vitality; also used for mild depression

- 2 ml *Cinamomum Verum*
- 2 ml *Mentha Piperitas*
- 2 ml *Thymus Satureoides*
- 2 ml *Ravensara Aromatica*
- 2 ml *Melaleuca Alternifolia*
- 90 ml first cold press olive oil

Mix together and take 1/2 teaspoon 3 times a day for 30 days. Because this tonic is taken orally, it's especially important to buy high-quality therapeutic essential oils.

Here are some brand names you can trust:

- Pranarom, distributed by Robert & Son
- Heliolab, distributed by Heliolab
- Sanoflore, distributed by Sanoflore 

Besides working at Maison d'Hérelle, Carole Durand collaborates with the Canadian Health Network to increase the visibility of CAT in Quebec. She writes for CPAVH's *Le Point de VIH+* and gives workshops throughout Quebec to promote the use of CAT for AIDS. She is currently working on a clinical trial that will evaluate the efficacy of essential oils in immune reconstitution. If you have any questions or need support, you may contact her by e-mail at carolenat@hotmail.com.