

WOMAN

AIDS
Does this woman have the answer?



AIDS CAN THIS WOMAN REALLY HELP?

No one has found a cure but for these AIDS sufferers a remarkable healer has offered some hope for the future. Alan Bestic reports

John Campbell was 18 when he learned he was HIV positive, carrying the virus that can cause AIDS. When it attacked with savage speed four months later, he became so ill he was not expected to survive 1988.

Yet today he's fitter than he's been for months and more contented than he's been for years. The virus is dormant again—perhaps for months, perhaps for years, perhaps for ever.

John's life has been transformed, he says, by Shirin Naidoo, an Indian psychotherapist and aromatherapist. She works on a voluntary basis at Frontliners, a group formed with the Terrence Higgins Trust to help those with AIDS. She also works at London Light-house with people who have haemophilia and AIDS. Those who can't afford treatment are usually given free help.

Shirin never claims she can cure people with AIDS but she says her therapy can improve the quality of their lives. However, many of Shirin's patients say they'd be dead if it weren't for her.

Shirin uses aromatherapy and a form of psychotherapy to change behaviour patterns and enable people to assume control over their lives through positive thinking. Aromatherapy involves the use of healing oils which are massaged into the body, burned in a container in the room or used

in the bath. Her psychotherapy involves what she calls an altered state of consciousness. "Some call it a form of self-hypnosis," she says. "But I think of it as a state in which people are able to relax their souls."

John first met Shirin in March last year. AIDS had already caused extreme muscular wastage in his body. For a while he was in a wheelchair, which shattered him because he'd been an enthusiastic athlete.

"At first I thought Shirin's therapy was mumbo-jumbo," he says. "At the start she showed me how to take myself into an altered state of consciousness, which was incredibly relaxing. Then she taught me to visualise the negative elements in my body—the sickness—and sweep them away with positive images."

"I visualised rats gnawing at me, then I created the image of a cloud of positive energy destroying the rats. After that I wasn't leaning on my sticks any more, just using them for balance."

"Shirin told me I could get well if I wanted to. It was up to me. That was news—doctors had always said that people with AIDS died." Later on, though, a massive relapse sent John back to hospital and into the wheelchair he dreaded. Just as he began to think he'd left his new therapy too late, a doctor said: "Remember what Shirin told you. You can get

out of that chair... if you want to!" John got out of the chair and walked out of the hospital using sticks. Soon afterwards, he stopped taking the drugs prescribed for him, despite being warned by the hospital that he'd probably die without them.

"Now I go to hospital only to have my blood count monitored and to check on any new condition appearing," he says. "When I learn what's wrong, Shirin and I work out the best way to deal with it. When I got

meningitis, I continued to refuse drugs, even pain-killers, though at times the pain had me screaming. Eventually, I discharged myself from hospital and worked out a programme with Shirin. Within weeks, the meningitis had gone.

"After my last check, the doctors told me the virus was dormant. I know it may flare up again but meanwhile I'm feeling fine. I honestly believe I'd be dead if I hadn't met Shirin."

Elizabeth was 17 when she became a heroin addict, injecting

and sharing needles. In May 1987, when she was 21, she learned she was HIV positive. "I didn't think I was a bad person, compared with some others," she says. "But I had the virus and they hadn't."

Three months after her diagnosis, Elizabeth stopped using heroin: "I'd reached the point where I was so miserable using the drug, that not using it had to be better." Last April, she met Shirin.

"She didn't mollycoddle me, just started making my negative feelings positive. She said: 'If you hadn't got the AIDS virus, you mightn't have stopped using heroin. She radiates positive energy. Once she held her hands over me and I felt as if a pure, protective cloud was filling the void I'd once filled with drugs.'

"In spite of the virus, which I know may attack my body at any



John Campbell: "After Shirin's therapy I could feel my body relaxing" time, I'm happier than I've ever been in my life."

Anne is middle-aged, middle-class, married with grown-up children—and has been diagnosed as HIV positive. She was infected by her husband and remembers her early reaction.

"In the street I'd look at people and think: 'If only they knew, they'd spit at me,'" she says. "It was a while before I stopped feeling like a leper." Shirin has helped Anne enormously.

"She gave me hope. During my

'I still feel grief, but I'm on top of life again'

first session something remarkable happened. I was deeply relaxed and, as she moved her hands above me, a wave of brilliant violet light seemed to fill me. I felt as if the layers of ancient grief were struggling to the surface. I knew then that healing was taking place.

"I still feel enormous hurt and grief but now I'm on top of life again. My husband and I still love each other but we're separating. He's developed AIDS now and I know I can't look after him."

"Shirin has taught me that the virus isn't everything; that living for now and the quality of now are so very much more important."

The Terrence Higgins Trust has a list of complementary therapists for those with AIDS who wish to seek help outside orthodox medicine. But Shirin is the only one working on their premises. You can call the Trust on (01) 242 1010 between 3pm and 10pm. The lines are open seven days a week. Shirin Naidoo may be contacted direct on (01) 907 7876.

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THE CARING PRINCESS



Diana is concerned about the plight of AIDS victims and has already done much to help through her direct contact with sufferers. This week (July 25) she opens Lambeth AIDS Action's "Landmark" Day Centre which will offer support and advice on related problems, such as housing and benefits. "We invited the Princess of Wales to open the centre because she's taken a special interest in services for people with AIDS," says Geoff Rayner, Lambeth's health liaison officer.

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