

A therapeutic collaboration between an anthroposophic medical doctor and a therapeutic eurythmist

Anthroposophic medicine is most fully realized when practiced through a multi-disciplinary approach. In much the same way that an illness may be expressed through varied symptoms and manifestations, so, too are the manifold therapeutic approaches that can work to support that disease process. Many practitioners experience that anthroposophic remedies work better when someone also does therapeutic eurythmy, and that eurythmy is more potent when someone also takes anthroposophic medicines. This arises out of the synergy of cooperative care and a shared, living picture of the individual patient.

Anthroposophic Medicine: Alicia Landman-Reiner

Six-year-old Carrie has been treated by her primary care doctor, with one antibiotic after another for much of the past nine months, for repeated bouts of ear and sinus infections. She sits in my office, leaning against her mother, pale, slender, quiet and neatly dressed. After a day in first grade, mom reports, she is whiney and doesn't want to play outdoors.

Four-year-old Noah roams about my office carrying his father's cell phone, while his dad describes Noah as distraught at mealtimes, screaming if his shirts have labels in them, hiding from the vacuum cleaner, and whacking his toddler brother. He lies awake for some time after going to bed at 8:30 pm, and has trouble waking up in the mornings.

How can we see vitality in our patients? It is helpful to think about how you know whether your plant needs more water. In its pot, or in its garden bed, your plant might droop and lose the freshness of its green color, or it might stiffen up and look dry.

A young child's normal state is full of vitality—we can see the difference if they are “droopy” like Carrie. She leans against her mom, having lost a child's normal buoyancy. Her vitality is challenged such that foreign life-forms—infections—too easily dominate her own organism and have to be repeatedly fought off by external means, namely, antibiotics.

Noah, on the other hand, is like the stiff, dry plant. He lacks fluidity in a broader sense. He cannot bridge difficulties, but breaks into howls of distress or strikes out. His organism lacks the ballast which our etheric forces provide us—like a sturdy boat with a solid keel—and so, he is over-reactive to insults, changes, people, and even to his own sense impressions.

Both children lack a “breathing” quality in their movement—Carrie is too still, while Noah is restless and wound up, a bit like an asthmatic who breathes in, but cannot breathe out easily. Their larger “breathing” of sleep and waking are disturbed, Carrie is tired too early in the day, and even after Noah has bedtime stories and a song, it is some time before he can breathe out into sleep. Each of these children needs support for his or her etheric forces.

It will be helpful to both children to get to bed early, when circadian rhythms favor their organs of building and regeneration (especially the liver). Each child needs a lot of sleep. Even though Carrie is six years old and past afternoon naps, she will benefit from lying down for half an hour after coming home from school and getting 10-11 hours of sleep at night. Eleven to 12 hours of sleep will support Noah's bodily and emotional flexibility. A regular daily rhythm of waking, meals, vigorous activity, rest, and bedtimes will carry them, that is, will spare the use of their own etheric forces so much to get them through the day. These measures will support any more specific therapies.

I recommend bath therapy for Carrie, because water speaks the language of the etheric. Her mother can be instructed in how to give her regular warm baths containing an essence or oil made from the blackthorn plant or Prunus spinosa. Prunus is a small tree in the plum family which ripens very slowly over a long summer, holding back its growth and its blossoming. Prunus essence can also be administered orally. Carrie's baths are best given in a rhythmical fashion—weekly at about the same time—reinforcing the life rhythms which belong to the etheric. Carrie will also benefit from rhythmical massage, a specific bodywork technique whose light touch is designed to stimulate streaming fluid movement—the physical basis of the etheric forces—in the body.

Noah's parents can give him warm abdominal compresses made from yarrow or chamomile tea as he lies in bed while mom or dad tells a simple story. This therapy will support his metabolic organs, especially the liver, with its role in building and restoring, and he will fall asleep more easily.

Because both children need to conserve and replenish their etheric forces, we should conservatively pace intellectual activity and sense activity that can borrow forces urgently needed for building organic strength. Carrie would do better in a school environment with less emphasis on academic achievement at this stage, though that may not be a change her parents are able to make. Noah should play outdoors a great deal, not only to work off his restless energy, but for a deeper reason—to support his bodily senses such as touch, proprioception (sensing where our limbs and joints are), and balance. These bodily senses will form a stable keel for the more mentally engaging sense activities such as seeing and hearing, which are more draining for him.

Noah should also have eurythmy therapy exercises, which, once taught, can be practiced for a few minutes at home, three or four times a week. Carrie should begin therapeutic eurythmy three to six months after her baths and massage therapy have been completed. These passive therapies are important for someone whose etheric is truly weakened. After that, the active movement of the therapeutic eurythmy will enable her to fully regain resistance.

Therapeutic Eurythmy: Glenda Monasch

The therapeutic eurythmy sessions will address the weakness of the life forces in each child, to stimulate and guide each in his or her own differing needs to buoyancy and balance so that the body is supported in its own natural healing processes. Eurythmy works in creating a dynamic field to address these concerns, through movements that underlie and support all organic nature. It works to loosen, lighten, unfold, envelop, and mold. It also helps to inform, awaken, stimulate, and sculpt the organs from inside, inwardly giving shape and articulation, as in embryological gastrula organ formation. The movements (consonants), infused with life forces that envelop the patient from without, invoke a strong inner imaging akin to what we receive from nature. At the same time, those that sculpt and form organically (vowels), are resonant and evocative emotionally, providing comfort and support from within. This healing movement works on many levels, weaving and tuning the life forces and the physiology (which are often referred to as lower) with the aspects of the soul-spiritual configuration. The art of the therapy is to balance these different levels: inner with outer, and upper with lower.

In order to bring life and flexibility to Noah, the emphasis would be to help loosen the life forces from their over-congestion in the physical where they are too compact, stiff, and inflexible, and to help lead these forces through the physical. In order to do this, the movements would need to be warming and rhythmical in their penetration to affect the proper catabolism, or breakdown of substances, in his digestion. It is perhaps because of the "incompleteness" of his digestion that Noah is often irritable and has trouble sleeping. Where previously there has been an incomplete

connection of the physical forces and the outer world, these invigorating movements help “anchor” the higher capacities or soul-forces in the organism, relieving tensions and oversensitivity. This formative activity stimulates breathing and releases the natural buoyancy of the life forces. The rhythm and warmth dissipate this congestion which is referred to, allowing the etheric forces to flow more freely through the physical body.

Rhythmic jumping, with eurythmy exercises using both legs, will help to properly engage the metabolism and develop proprioception and balance. As well as practicing Noah’s eurythmy exercises with his parents’ support, suggestions for other activities to be done at home would include bunny jumps with two feet, hopping on one foot, jumping over low objects and off a low chair or stool, simple jump rope suitable for a four-year-old, carrying heavy objects like a loaded bucket, pulling or pushing a loaded wagon/wheelbarrow, and also “wheel-barrowing,” in which the child walks on his hands and the parent carries the child’s legs.

These exercises and movements would engage Noah imaginatively and warm him with wonder, joy, and discovery through story and nursery rhymes. At the end of the session, Noah would be wrapped very tightly in a fresh and fragrant cotton sheet. This short rest allows for the movements to be embodied and the life forces to replenish. This wrapping is also a good remedy for his tactile sensitivity. His parents can do this wrapping for him at home in a large towel after a bath, or they can playfully wrap him in a “burrito” and lie him comfortably face down, pressing with strong pressure from his shoulders down to his feet before the bedtime compress and story.

Carrie, too, needs invigorating, up-building, and strengthening of the life forces, but the approach for her will be different. Here, as in a plant that is wilted from too little or infrequent watering, Carrie needs to be engaged in the up-building and nourishing stream for her digestion. As a plant receives fluid nourishment from the roots and draws this stream up the stem through the branches and out through the leaves into the atmosphere, where it is finely dispersed and rains down to be received in through the thirsty roots again, the rhythmic movement Carrie will practice will draw her into the full circulation of the fluid process in her organism. The nerve/sense pole needs to be finely dispersed, and the lower metabolic system needs to be encouraged, through these exercises, to engage and absorb. This movement exercise also needs to stimulate the gall for the bile in digestion to invigorate and give her the physical foundation for vigorous activity.

The in-winding spiral is the archetype of the strengthening process for the etheric forces. Carrie will work with a movement that enhances this proper drawing in so that she feels housed and contained. This would be followed by an innerforming exercise whereby the metabolic absorption and excretion is strengthened. In activating a dialogue between the inner-forming and the outer-cocooning, a dynamic interplay between these polarities establishes a balance and strengthens the inner organization and resistance. This process is enhanced in the practice by changing speeds, slowly increasing the dynamic, and then quickly slowing down. This increases her resistance, forces of buoyancy, and endurance. All these exercises are done in a quiet, calm, and sustaining mood, with a warm and encouraging strength, and with uplifting images that connect her to the world receptively and energetically. Carrie would then also be wrapped in a cocoon sheet at the end of the session to rest and restore her strength.

The therapy for both children is developed in weekly 30-45 minute sessions over a period of six to eight weeks. During this period of time, a short home practice is established, distilled out of the exercises, and developed for the child to do before bedtime. This two-month period allows for a renewal and strengthening of the etheric forces in the first month, and the establishing and reinforcing of this new pattern of life in the next.

Alicia Landman-Reiner:

Anthroposophic therapeutics can help Carrie's own etheric—her own body—to resist infections, growing stronger and requiring fewer antibiotics. Indeed, children treated anthroposophically for acute infections require fewer antibiotics. Noah can achieve greater stability, reduced tendency to overstimulation, and a healthier sleep-wake rhythm through the hygienic measures and therapies described. I have seen many children like Carrie and Noah gain or regain resistance, buoyancy, and endurance-- thus strengthening their etheric—with such treatment.

As a final note, therapeutic eurythmy movements, though they can be aerobic and strenuous in their repetition, are neither physical gymnastic exercises nor ballet dance movements. They articulate the human being's relationship to the world as language does and attempt to capture flowing harmonious processes as well as shaped and sculpted movements, as for example, the flight of a flock of birds, the unfolding of a fern in slow motion, the pulsing breath of a sea anemone, the undulation of a meandering river, the power of a flowing volcano, or the confronting focus of a cliff face. To become a therapeutic eurythmist, the training is rigorous, comprising a full time, four-year program for eurythmy and postgraduate training for certification.

Alicia Landman-Reiner, MD, who organizes the International Postgraduate Medical Training (IMPT) in the US, practiced anthroposophically in Massachusetts from 1987 through 2004, as a board-certified family doctor, and now practices part-time in Moab, Utah. She works with Waldorf schools in Massachusetts and Washington, DC. She directs the Physicians' Association for Anthroposophic Medicine's (PAAM) physician education, chairs the anthroposophic physician-certifying body for North America, and is president of AAMTA. She has greatly enjoyed the privilege of teaching doctors about AM in Australia, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, Sweden, and Switzerland. She and her husband love hiking the high desert country.

Glenda Monasch, TE, holds a eurythmy diploma from the Academy of Eurythmic Art at the Goetheanum and she has many years of performing experience. She received her therapeutic eurythmy diploma from the English Curative Eurythmy Training in 1994. Ms. Monasch is co-director of Sound Circle Eurythmy School. She has worked extensively teaching eurythmy to all ages and abilities. She directs remedial services at Shining Mountain Waldorf School, and maintains a therapeutic eurythmy practice, in Boulder, Colorado.