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**Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic:  
A Case Study in the Integrative Medicine Experience through ‘The Springs’**

Water has always been symbolic. It “possesses potent powers. As a cleaning agent, its universality and value are unparalleled, not only as a remover of soil but also as a metaphoric purifier of souls.”<sup>1</sup> Since the time of the Greeks and Romans, water of certain kinds has had an even more special significance. Certain springs—hot springs, mineral springs, sulfur springs—were believed to retain certain healing powers. The interpretation of these powers varied around the globe. In the aptly named Bath, England, the hot springs were dedicated by the Celts and later Romans to the goddess Sulis Minerva, a life-giving mother who was believed to be both nourishing to her children and ferocious to her enemies.<sup>2</sup> In Yangbajain, Tibet, where the hot springs are arguably at the highest altitude in the world, the springs were, according to Tibetan myth, caused by the angry tears of a fairy. Regardless of the origin, in virtually every country on the planet, there is a spring that holds some significance to the people familiar with it. The healing properties of these springs have captivated and entranced countless generations, and their influence continues to the modern day.

In the United States, the importance of various springs in regards to health and well-being has been long present. Early in the 14th century Juan Ponce de Leon’s explorations led him to what he believed was the “Fountain of Youth.”<sup>3</sup> Later, in upstate New York, the Native Americans who recognized the water’s unique healing properties introduced white settlers to these miraculous sulfur waters. Notable spa towns include Sharon Springs, which “was a fashionable spa in an age of spas, when curative mineral

springs channeled into manmade baths and fountains were the nuclei of many of the most elegant and fashionable resorts of nineteenth-century America.”<sup>4</sup>

Clifton Springs, as it is now named, originally was designated as “the sulfur springs”—a simple description that demonstrates the early importance of the waters to the budding community. In 1849, Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic’s founder, Dr. Henry Foster, came to this small rural village with a dream. Foster was known as an “administrator, idealistic Christian and above all, a sound and progressive physician, often years ahead of his time.”<sup>5</sup> A testament to his progressive tactics was the enthusiasm he had for the potential present in water cures. His establishment of the original Clifton Springs Sanitarium and Clinic was motivated not so much for profit, but because Foster viewed it as his greater mission from God. The Sanitarium was initially an extremely small structure. Foster was appointed medical director, and for the first year and a half, was the only physician in attendance. Over the coming years the original building would be remodeled and expanded many times, as the demands for Foster’s services grew. Foster believed in three components to health care—the mind, the body, and the spirit. If one aspect was left unattended, the other two would be off balance. In order to treat the patient fully and completely, all three must be focused on. That mission—that a patient’s care combines mind, body, and spirit—continues at Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic to this day.

When Foster first began his work, the water cure movement had not been especially well-known. However, by the 1850s, the Sanitarium’s reputation and popularity grew, forcing Foster to expand. He enlisted the help of his brother William, and together they built the Foster Building, four-stories high, which sat across the street

from the main facility. Initially constructed to be a hotel, the Sanitarium hospital was eventually moved to its upper levels. The next decade saw many changes. A new four-story east wing was opened in 1856. A west wing was added in 1864, and a year later the original facility's frame was completely replaced with a five-story structure. In 1867, Foster became the sole owner of the entire project, and as the water cure business continued to boom, Clifton Springs developed into an actual village.

In addition to Dr. Foster's concern for the well-being of his patients, he was invested in the growth of the community of Clifton Springs as well. He was a noted philanthropist, donating to all religious denominations and local civic efforts. Inspired by a group of his employees who formed a makeshift YMCA in the Sanitarium gymnasium in 1877, Foster built and donated a two-story building adjoining the Foster building—the home of the village's YMCA today. In the 1890's, a redesign of all the buildings and wings was begun, in order to make the Sanitarium completely fireproof.

Dr. Foster's legacy is in large part due to his innovative outlook on medicine. He was a man who was able to combine his deep spirituality and advancing scientific developments with ease and grace. Among some of his accomplishments, he “introduced hand massage and electrochemical, electro-thermal, Turkish, and salt baths. He established a gymnasium with a competent instructor in the infancy of physical culture. He recognized the importance of mental therapy before most medical men of his time. He pioneered in opening a laboratory for the study and diagnosis of disease. He introduced a surgical department and an eye, ear, nose and throat division at an early date.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to these many ‘firsts,’ Foster installed a suspension apparatus for correcting spinal deformities at a time when orthopedic science was practically unheard

of. He began a nurses' training school in 1892, at a time when the women's rights movement and a desire for independence and equality was beginning to bloom. Dr. Foster's efforts also ensured that Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic was only the second medical facility in the country to own an x-ray.

While certainly in tune with the medical novelties of the day, Foster was also greatly invested in the natural surroundings that had brought him there. The springs was in itself of enormous importance in regards to health, and Foster sought to create the total mind-body experience in the construction of the elm-walk, mystic bridge, and swan pond—all which provided relaxation and serenity to his patients. Nature trails, fields, and a golf course all contributed to Foster's ideal healing spot. When Foster began to spend winters in Florida, he became interested in citrus, developing his own fruit farms and shipping the vitamin-rich fruit back to his patients in New York. To this day, the swan pond, elm walk, and labyrinth remain essential components of the Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic experience. His dedication to improving the field of medicine, both through scientific advances, and through water cures, was truly inspiring.

To ensure that his mission of mind-body-and spirit were carried on in the hospital following his death, Foster drew up a Deed of Trust, which specified that the entirety of the enterprise was to be held in a permanent trust. Certain conditions of Foster's were to be met, such as any profits must go back into the plant, and the Board of Trustees must be a mix of those chosen and those who are members by extension of various religious organizations. Foster's religious concerns were also addressed. The first chapel had been added to the Sanitarium in 1859 (complete with an elaborate Tiffany mosaic that is estimated at over four million dollars today). In order to ensure the continuation of the

religious element in Clifton Springs health care, he dictated that several denominations should be represented on the Board at all times, and that the hospital should have a chapel and full-time chaplain as long as it is in existence, providing for the mental and spiritual needs of Clifton Spring's patients.

Today, Foster's legacy has remained the backbone of Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic. Their mission remains that to treat a patient fully, the mind-body-spirit model must be addressed. In a modern age where technology and scientific study often take precedence over alternative modes of healing, Clifton Springs has remained steadfast in its specialization services. Departments include acute care, behavioral health, cancer care, diabetes health, emergency, hyperbaric wound care, joint replacement, nursing home, rehabilitation services, specialty care, and women's health. Yet, it is their values concerning holistic medicine that are most notable for their longevity. Similarly, in a time when antibiotics and harsh chemicals are being used to treat illness and disease, many patients are drawn to alternative, less invasive modes of healing. The Springs, the alternative, Eastern-medicine focused branch of Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic, encompasses an entire wing of the facility.

The water cure portion of the hospital was closed for a time beginning in the 1950s, as rapid technological advances and a focus on Western medicine was utilized. In 2000, The Springs was reopened, appropriately on the 150th anniversary of the hospital. The Springs emphasizes the health of the whole person—and recognizes that each individual will need specific therapies to ensure that wellness. Thus, The Springs works in partnership with the greater Clifton Springs Hospital & Clinic, pairing alternative treatment methods with more traditional, Western medicine. The Springs defines itself

as “an Integrative Medicine Center offering the best treatments associated with nature within a hospital setting.”<sup>7</sup> Although integrative clinics are popping up all over the country as alternative sources of medicine become more popular, Clifton Springs is unique in that it provides all spectrums of health care to their patients, and has had this philosophy for over 150 years.

The services offered at The Springs are myriad. Some of the most popular include naturopathic and Chinese medicine, acupuncture, Qi Gong therapy, hypnotherapy, holistic nursing, Reiki, aromatherapy, massage (as specific as a massage for people living with cancer, to prenatal massage), lymphatic stimulation, foot treatment, mineral springs soak, hydro-massage bath, detox sheet wrap, facial treatments, body treatments, nail services, and waxing. Specialists from The Springs work with the doctors in the main hospital and with the patient to determine what therapies would benefit them the most, according to their specific needs.

The American health care system has its share of faults. Doctors are over-worked or burnt out, hospitals provide very little privacy, and patients often feel vulnerable and overwhelmed by the many treatments and protocol they are being told to follow. Integrative medicine, by contrast, is notable for its focus on relaxation—promoting meditation, yoga, and tai chi. Integrative medicine provides options; there is not only one path that will work for a patient, but many, and it is up to them to decide what they are most comfortable with. Alternative medicine is also important because it stresses life habits—nutrition, physical exercise, mental relief—major things that are developed over the long-term, and are expected to last long-term, in order to change the patient’s lifestyle for the better. The Springs has for the past nine years embodied the mind-body-spirit

perspective which has become increasingly popular around the country as of late. Western medicine, when offered alongside Eastern methods and practices, give the doctor and patients more options, more optimism, and more hope. Various studies are currently underway to better understand the true objectives of Integrative medicine. Duke University has recently been involved in a study focused on whether certain stress-relieving techniques like meditation and writing in a journal, can contribute to the prevention of preterm labor. Other trials are investigating the affect of acupuncture on brain activity, the affects of certain herbs on Parkinson's disease, and if biofeedback usage can efficiently treat incontinence.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, while there are large amounts of supporters for Integrative medicine, there are also some critics. They are concerned that within the vast amount of therapies and treatment plans offered within Integrative medicine, some options might be more harmful than helpful. They argue that "it's crucial to hold alternative therapies up to scientific scrutiny...because doctors and patients alike need answers."<sup>9</sup> This is, of course, an extremely valid point, and the key to making Integrative medicine work, as The Springs has done, is to develop treatment and therapy plans alongside a patient's regular doctor, taking care to work with, not replace, any existing health care treatment. However, one should consider whether or not it seems feasible to include Integrative Medicine as a necessary requirement for all young doctors in medical school. For small, rural hospitals that have little access to such a center as The Springs, it might be a good idea to have doctors who are equally versed in both Western and Eastern methods of care. Doctors with different priorities might in fact have influence on the way patients think about themselves, their bodies, and their own health care, in a largely positive way.

Unfortunately, with Integrative Medicine nowhere near as widely accepted as traditional Western medicine, the issue of insurance for many patients can be an important factor in prohibiting their participation in The Springs and similar organizations, even if they want to. Acupuncture and certain mind-body therapies sometimes will be covered, but the majority of therapies offered will not. Sadly, those who seek Integrative medicine as a part of their overall treatment plan may very well be paying out of their own pocket—a sort of investment in their health and well-being. However, the majority of persons who can afford (both literally and emotionally) to take part in this alternative healing process are those who are already sick or suffer from a chronic illness. Although ideally, America would work to get citizens access to many of the mind-body-spirit treatments offered through Integrative Medicine, as a means of preventative care and to ensure the start of healthy life habits—the reality is that, in light of the current economic times, this just isn't possible. People don't want to think about being sick if they aren't, and they don't want to go to a hospital, even if the Integrative Medicine center is in no way involved with Western technique.

Recently, in the months following President Obama's inauguration, the issue of increased affordability and accessibility towards Integrative medicine has been addressed. An article published in the *Wall Street Journal*, by four prestigious doctors, urges Obama to consider “that if we want to make affordable health care available to the 45 million Americans who do not have health insurance, then we need to address the fundamental causes of health and illness, and provide incentives for healthy ways of living rather than reimbursing only drugs and surgery.”<sup>10</sup> They urge the President to consider the ways in which Integrative Medicine can transform lives by preventing illness before it happens.

As they state, “the [heart] disease that accounts for more premature deaths and costs Americans more than any other illness is almost completely preventable simply by changing diet and lifestyle.”<sup>11</sup> And incorporating some of the practices that Integrative Medicine encourages can do that. According to these doctors, “it’s time to move past the debate of alternative medicine versus traditional medicine, and to focus on what works, what doesn’t, for whom, and under which circumstances.”<sup>12</sup>

Certainly, the argument isn’t to abandon all of our Western medicine practices that have worked wonders up until now. There is much to be said for the modern miracles of technology. However, in order to create the full treatment experience for the patient—that of mind, body, and spirit—it is essential to combine elements of the future with those of the past. Integrative medicine might not be supported by all doctors, but the philosophy behind it certainly has been proven to work. It will take government money initially to accomplish this, but eventually, the long-term results of reduced spending on individual patients and increased overall health of the nation will be more than enough compensation. A new administration bodes new hope for the world of alternative and Integrative Medicine. Surely, The Springs will be affected by this in some way.

### **Endnotes**

1 Susan E. Cayleff, *Wash and Be Healed: The Water-Cure Movement and Women’s Health* (Temple U. Press: 1987).

2 Joyce Reynolds and Terence Volk, “Review: Gifts, Curses, Cult and Society at Bath,” reviewing *The Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath: vol. 2 The Finds from the Sacred Spring*, in *Britannia* 21 (1990: 379-391).

3 Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America, The Southern Voyages* (Oxford U. Press: 1974).

4 Stuart M. Blumin, *The Short Season of Sharon Springs: Portrait of an American Village* (Cornell U. Press: 1980).

5 Arch Merrill, “The Life of Henry Foster, M.D.—An Overview.”

6 Ibid.

7 The Springs: Integrative Medicine Center-About us <[www.thespringsatclifton.com](http://www.thespringsatclifton.com)>

8 Katherine Kam, “What Is Integrative Medicine? Experts explore new ways to treat the mind, body, and spirit—all at the same time,” *WebMD, Inc.* September 10, 2007.

9 Ibid.

10 Deepak Chopra, Dean Ornish, Rustom Roy and Andrew Weil, “ ‘Alternative’ Medicine is Mainstream,” *The Wall Street Journal.* January 9, 2009.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid

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