



# The London Massage Company

## Newsletter 09

Hi there. We're back and this month we bring you a Morocco special.

This seems quite appropriate considering that it is Zoë's last couple of months in this fabulous country. She is off to pastures new, France to be precise, so she'll bring you her news of life as a therapist in this part of the world later. In the mean time, if any of you have experience of practising in France, or you know people who have, she would love to hear from you. By all accounts it seems like she will need all the help she can get!

But this issue, Jane brings you her write up of her volunteering experience in Rabat for the charity Cross Cultural Solutions.

Sarah Walton-Smith was in touch with us and has written a great piece about her experience of Traditional Medicine in Marrakech. Thank you Sarah.

### News Just in - Sports Massage Therapy Regulations

If you are reading this newsletter as a Sports Massage Therapist you may be aware that there are changes afoot within the industry. In July I attended a meeting at

### Welcome!

#### What's up?

- // Sports Massage Therapy Regulations
- // Traditional Medicine in Marrakech
- // Rabat
- // Ones to watch
- // Hall of Fab Things

Skills Active, a body set up to update the National Occupational Standards (NOS) in Sports Therapy and Sports Massage. Some of you may have received an email from us asking you to comment on these suggested Standards. The NOS make up a set of standards which employers may use as a checklist against existing qualifications offered by awarding bodies. The Standards are "occupational" Standards and describe job roles. Ben Gittus of Skills Active writes, *"We hope the Standards will be useful for the sector to set some nationally agreed benchmarks of skills and competencies but we will not be licensing people against the Standards. Skills*

*Active will use the standards to approve vocational qualifications and organisations".*

It is my understanding that these standards will not affect existing therapists, nor those about to embark on training. The GCMT (General Massage Therapy Council) are also hot on the case and are liaising with Skills Active with regards sports massage standards. The APNT, for whom I am Sports Massage Consultant, is a member of the GCMT who will no doubt inform APNT of anything that may affect its members. I will of course inform you!

Jane

#### Ones to Watch:

// **The Royal College of Surgeons of England** Family friendly events at the Hunterian Museum

1.) A beginner's guide to mummification  
Saturday 26 July, 2-5pm . A family day suitable for children aged 7-11 years led by Joyce Filer, author of *The Mystery of the Egyptian Mummy*, a British Museum publication for KS2 students.

2.) Barber Surgeon: leeches, lancets and blood-letting  
Friday 15 and Saturday 16 August, at 12noon and 2pm .  
Suitable for all ages, audience participation encouraged by children and grown-ups!

All events are FREE, but visitors must book. Call on: 020 7869 6560 or email: [museums@rcseng.ac.uk](mailto:museums@rcseng.ac.uk)

// **'Skeletons: London's buried bones'** 23 skeletons found under London streets. Explore how Londoners once lived, the health, diet, diseases and lifestyle of the deceased. A Fascinating exhibition. 23 July-28 September, Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE. Admission free. For more information - [www.wellcomecollection.org/exhibitionsandevents/events](http://www.wellcomecollection.org/exhibitionsandevents/events)



## Traditional Medicine in Marrakech

by Sarah Walton-Smith MA, BSc (Hons), RGN  
Aromatherapist and Medical Anthropologist

Standing behind the medicine counter of his tiny, dark, one-room herbalist shop tucked behind the Place des épices within the dense, chaotic and claustrophobic souk of Marrakech, the magic and mystery of traditional Moroccan herbal medicine was slowly revealed. Surrounded by shelves stacked up to the ceiling with bottles and jars full of various plant extracts, creams and oils, many labelled in both French and Arabic, safran, ostéoporose, frigidité, eczema, tension, les diabetes, Youssef Jalaby wearing a white laboratory coat, poured argan oil into small glass bottles and welcomed me to sit on his wooden bench in front of the counter. Over many days I had visited Youssef to spend time listening to his narrative and observing the clients who visited his tiny apothecary. I was here in Marrakech for several weeks to research and explore the beliefs, values and meanings attributed to the use of traditional medicine in Morocco. Youssef was now about to tell me with great enthusiasm of a patient whom he had treated during the early months of the year:

“All natural herbs are derived from the teaching of the Qur’an. As we come from sand so all things are natural and we can benefit from these natural plants and herbs and live a good life. If a man has slept with another woman who is not his wife and comes to me because he has a sexually transmitted disease, I will give him a herbal remedy and he must also learn that this has occurred because he has gone against the learnings from the Qur’an. I treated a

man for a month who was suffering from cancer of the stomach. He was about 60 years old and came to because he was feeling so tired, had no energy and could not even walk up the stairs in his home. I gave him a mixture of four herbs which he took every day with water for one month and when he returned to his doctor, he was asked where he was going for his treatment. He had regained the strength which he had lost”

In Morocco, as in many other cultures, patients do not rely exclusively on traditional medicine or exclusively biomedicine. A patient’s decision to choose one or another type of care depends upon a variety of factors: cost, convenience, beliefs, personal prestige of the practitioner. Traditional medicine is still popular in Morocco and is an important form of healthcare for many people. According to Bellakhdar (1989: 194) although deprived of its official status by modern medicine, traditional medical practice continues to serve a large clientele in Morocco. Medical pluralism in Morocco boasts a variety of health practitioners including the herbalist (attar), the scribe (fqih), Islamic healers (sherif), the traditional midwife (qabla) and biomedical practitioners. Carla Makhoul Obermeyer (2000:183) suggests that several factors shape the contemporary context of healthcare in Morocco. The traditional health system incorporated elements from three sources: the Galenic system, centering principally on notions of

hot and cold; rich herbalist lore, used by a diverse group of traditional healers; and so-called “Prophetic medicine”. These elements co-exist with “local biomedicine” and the services provided by the traditional healers are still relevant to the communities in Marrakech. One of the strengths of traditional medicine is that it is a practical art, well rooted in the local culture, and the relationship between the patient and the therapist is simple and close.

Moroccan people have a rich and ancient tradition in phytotherapy and in modern society, herbal medicine based on this heritage continues to flourish and play a pivotal role. There are numerous medicinal plants cited for the treatment of many diseases and herbal medicine is an integral part of Moroccan culture. The physician Ibn al-Baytar (1197-1248), authored the Compendium of simple drugs and food (al-jami’ li-mufradat al adwiya wa’ l-aghdhhiya), in which he described more than 1400 medicinal drugs derived from herbs. Over 20,000 medicinal herbs were recently inventoried by the World Health Organization (WHO), and approximately 250 species were analysed to identify their bioactive chemical components (Azaizeh 2006: 230).

That evening hidden away in a secret garden on the edge of the old city and the historical Jemaa El Fna square, I enjoyed the cosy intimacy of the riad where I was to spend a few relaxing days. Red rose petals were strewn over the floor of the entrance and the



aroma of rose incense awakened my senses in the candle lit hallway. That evening I enjoyed the experience of a wonderful relaxing aromatherapy massage with argan oil, rose (*Rosa damascena*) and ylang ylang (*Cananga odorata*) oils. Argan oil from the argan tree (*Argania spinosa*), known locally in Morocco as 'the tree of life' has twice as much vitamin E as olive oil and is rich in antioxidants. Berber women have used argan oil for centuries to nourish and protect their hair skin and nails as well as a food. It is traditionally used to treat acne, dry eczema, psoriasis, chicken pox, scars and also to massage painful joints and muscles. Back in London prior to departing for Marrakech I had met with Ruth Hajioff whose company Wild Wood Groves [www.wildwoodgroves.com](http://www.wildwoodgroves.com) is dedicated to promoting argan oil. Ruth regularly contributes her time to non-profit making ventures which promote and explore the conservation, growth and development of argan, and has been invited to several symposiums dedicated to exploration of the benefits of argan.

The past decade has seen a renewed global interest in traditional systems of medicine and medicinal plants. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) up to 80% of the population in developing countries, approximately 3.5 billion people, depend on traditional and botanical medicines as their primary source of healthcare. In Morocco, the traditional herbalist is still popular and herbal medicine

remains an important form of health care for many people. The traditional system never exists alone: it is now seemingly always in competition with Western biomedicine. Integration and understanding of the two is desirable. As I walked in the Marrakech medina at dusk, watching the swallows in the sky and listening to the muezzin call the faithful to sunset prayer, salat al mahgrib, I recalled the quote within Horton (1973: 293) "the romantic search for a 'lost world' has given rise to an image of traditional culture which is understood entirely as a reaction to the stresses and strains of life in the modern West".

Sarah Walton-Smith. If you have any questions or would like to chat to Sarah further you can contact her on: [sarahws63@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahws63@hotmail.com)

#### References

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Sarah on Jemaa El Fna square



## Rabat

by Jane Johnson, MCSP, MSc, BSc, BA (Hons)

Some of you may remember the Massage-a-thon held last August here in London, the proceeds of which went to Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS), a worldwide charity with the aims of empowering people and their communities. In December I took my eight-year-old son (Jake) and myself to Rabat, the capital of Morocco, where we stayed in a large villa with CCS volunteers from all over the world, the first time I had ever done any overseas volunteering. Being a coastal city it was cold, unlike Marrakech where we had spent the previous Christmas following a camel trek in the desert, but for Jake this was much made up for by the fact that we had bunk beds.

Each day the minivan driver, Ishmael, collected his first group of volunteers and drove us to our respective places of work before returning to make a further 3 trips. Jake had chosen to go with some other volunteers to the local children's hospital where all morning he played with children on the oncology and asthma wards, kids who would otherwise have been left all day alone in their rooms with no toys and little by way of stimulating activity. Of course, he wanted to know why some of the children had no hair and they were equally intrigued by his appearance, being blond haired and blue eyed. (Despite being a beautiful city with a lively market and many buildings of historic interest Rabat has few tourists). Jake was also curious as to why there were so many feral cats allowed in the hospital and, never having been in hospital himself, asked if we had

them on our wards back in London. "How can you tell if it is safe to stroke a feral cat?" (they're the ones with clipped ears to show they have been vaccinated) became a popular question with which he would quiz unsuspecting adults once he



discovered this. I was the only volunteer working in a unique school for disabled children where I had intended to provide massage and physiotherapy. "Here!" exclaimed the Director, proudly showing me his very clean but unused physiotherapy room. It was well stocked and spacious but was unfortunately the coldest room I had ever been in. He showed me the therapy couch, fully adjustable, and grinned broadly at the prospect of at last discovering a physiotherapist who might know how to use the equipment and treat the many children in his care. The question of how I was going to provide physiotherapy in such a cold environment, let alone massage, was immediately pressing and I wondered how I might get around this tactfully, given the language barrier. Before starting work I was led in to meet the children, each of whom I had to shake by hand and each of whom was instructed to say hello to me in

French (their first language is Moroccan Arabic, not learning French until they are 7) followed by every member of staff including all of the teachers, their assistants and the cleaners. In what I hoped was my most humble manner I requested to work on the large padded mats next to the infants room where there were also many bolsters and wedges. It was still cold, but marginally warmer than the windowless physiotherapy room with its concrete floor. At first the Director seemed curious as to why I'd want to work there, but quickly acquiesced and before long was bringing in small groups of parents, journalists and local businessmen so he could show me off working with their children. "English therapist!" he beamed. It was a bit disconcerting I have to admit, as I sat cross legged rubbing the stiff calves of a child distracted with a copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, to find six faces, watching my every move intently. In a country where there are strict unwritten rules with regards to touching I was always especially careful, and always made sure I had the consent of the child with whom I was working, even if that meant a simple nod of the head.

Each day I played physical games with the children and tried to mobilize their stiff joints through layers and layers of clothing. Staff looked on incredulously when I took the children outside to play football. They had rarely been given such an opportunity and relished the chance to run around like the children from the adjacent school whose playground they were using. Of course, football is



## Rabat

hugely popular in Morocco, with groups of men playing it everywhere they can find space. Watching me in a full length flared skirt attempting to referee was probably an interesting spectacle for the onlookers. Overall it was a rewarding but difficult job. No one could tell me what the children were suffering from although many seemed to have cerebral palsy. One was simply deaf, a tiny 5 year old who held court with me daily, gesticulating like an orator as he happily lectured me in French for 15 minutes. He, like another was an orphan, abandoned because of his



disability.

Everyone was curious and I was keen to leave them with some means to empower themselves as teachers. I thus devised a simple exercise and positioning plan for each of the children I was working with and had it translated into Arabic. I demonstrated stretches and after much drawing and miming managed to convey the need for some special chairs to help the children to sit upright instead of leaving them slumped in a pushchair all day. Eyes widening in sudden understanding the Director took me to a huge disused theatre. It was gloomy inside and I peered into the dark to the enormous pile of what looked like scrap furniture. I wasn't sure what he

was showing me but he seemed very excited and the following morning I found two cleaners diligently scrubbing down some moulded seating. It turned out that the pile of furniture was just that, all manner of rotten and twisted therapy equipment salvaged from goodness knows where and left to rot until someone could explain how to use it.

Stretching was an activity that seemed to draw a crowd, perhaps because staff were not used to seeing a teacher prostrate on the floor. Yet pretending to be animals was one of the children's favourite activities I discovered, so at some point each day we would be a wriggling snake, swerving fish or prancing pony. By the end of the morning however my prancing abilities were exhausted and I was glad to be collected by Ishmael. Despite being covered head to foot as suggested etiquette for the region my appearance caused much amusement from the schoolchildren, especially the girls, as I waited outside the school for my lift back to base. Many of the parents of the disabled children brought their relatives with them and pointed at me surreptitiously from across the street. Some of the braver fathers shook my hand.

One day it rained so hard that it blew in through the high glassless windows and I became so wet that I was forced to use the physiotherapy room. Birds flew in and out chirruping and were ignored by everyone. I discovered that all of the children

loved Bob Marley and borrowed a CD from the minivan and let the children listen to it on my player whilst I mobilized their ankles and wrists and tried to help stretch the back of the knees of those with flexion deformities. I know music sometimes elevates muscle tone but sometimes you've just got to improvise, have a go and see what happens. Surprisingly, listening seemed to help many of the children relax, the general clatter and chatter of the school environment drowned out by the more regular beat of reggae.



Using a translator I asked the Director (Nourredine) and his assistant (Aziz) where were the physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists for these children. Nourredine explained that people with a degree had to be paid more money and his school did not have any funding so had to use help from untrained staff who were inexpensive. He relied on charities such as CCS for help, and he was willing and ingenious enough to take anything he could get. I explained that I was happy to teach some of my skills to the staff but he felt this would be of limited help as many Moroccans (including the staff themselves) didn't believe that much could be done for children with physical impairments. Even schooling



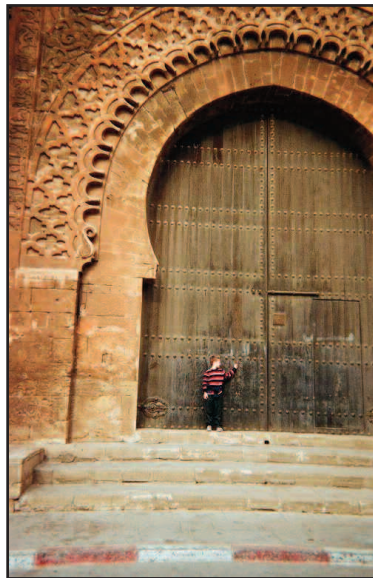
Last, but never least

them seemed pointless, to many. I wondered what sort of satisfaction the staff would get from their work if they believed it to be pointless (and later asked them this!) but all are women (with the exception of Aziz) and caring for children came naturally.

Altogether we spent three weeks working for CCS and enjoyed every minute. I didn't get to use much massage but was able to put my creative skills to use and learned how to adapt to this unusual therapy environment. It was a great experience for Jake, the first and only child volunteer, who I would love to say learned Arabic and how to identify many cultural differences, but who was actually most impressed by the fact that every Moroccan man he met knew who David Beckham was.

Jane Johnson

The next Charity Massage-a-thon is taking place in London on November 9th in aid of Crisis the charity for the homeless. For more info or to sign up as a therapist or a body, take a look at our website - [www.thelondonmassagecompany.com/new.aspx](http://www.thelondonmassagecompany.com/new.aspx)



## Hall of Fab Things. We're loving:

1.) [www.beautifulworldtents.co.uk](http://www.beautifulworldtents.co.uk)

Inspirational venues from around the world!

2.) [www.made.uk.com](http://www.made.uk.com)

The whole concept is brilliant and there's some beautiful items. We especially love UniqueEco - The Flip Flop Recycling Co. There's a brilliant documentary called '*Flip Flotsum*', about this very company which I watched a couple of years ago and had completely forgotten about until Jane discovered the website. Check it out if you get the chance.

3.) '*A Year in Green Tea and Tuk Tuks*,' by Rory Spowers. This book gets the ecological juices flowing and inspires you to look at the road less traveled, foot print included.

4.) Still up there are '*Totally Unique Thoughts*'. Sign up and get a daily message. We've have been getting them for over 6 months now and find these original and unique messages inspiring and uplifting - [theuniverse@tut.com](mailto:theuniverse@tut.com)

5.) '*One Red Paperclip*'. It is about a guy who trades up from a paperclip to a house. Totally inspiring, it re-affirms the power of bartering.