

Sidney Rose-Neil

1926 - 1999

Naturopath who defied the odds

*Roger Newman Turner pays
tribute to the remarkable
talents and achievements of
Sidney Rose-Neil, founder of
Tyringham Naturopathic
Clinic*

There were some in the naturopathic profession who would have regarded Sidney Rose-Neil as a bit of a maverick. Mavericks challenge the established dogma and follow new trails and Sidney, who died in January at the age of 72, certainly did that.

Single-mindedness and tenacity would be more appropriate epithets for it was these which enabled him to succeed in establishing a major complementary medicine discipline in the UK and in personally defying the ravages of a serious illness well beyond the expectations of many medical experts. The determination with which he pursued his professional goals was to serve him well when, in 1981, a stroke left him paralysed and speechless.

With the help of acupuncture, the treatment he had helped to popularise in this country, and the efforts of a devoted physiotherapist, he taught himself to walk again and defied the odds to lead a creative and useful life for a further 18 years.

Sidney Rose-Neil was born in the east-end of London and left school at the age of 14 to become an apprentice cabinet-maker, but within a few years he developed an interest in natural healing and studied at the British College of Naturopathy and Osteopathy.

It was after graduating and establishing a practice in London that he attended a post-graduate course on acupuncture in Germany and recognised its tremendous potential as a medical system.

New healing modalities all too often became easy pickings for opportunists and charlatans, particularly when summarily dismissed by the medical orthodoxy, as was acupuncture at that time. Sidney realised that if acupuncture were to be established as a credible and respected profession, it would need regulation and a sound educational base.

In 1961, he therefore helped to found the Acupuncture Association and Register and became its first chairman, a post he held until his illness. As the pre-eminent organisation in its field the association later won the right to use the prefix "British".

Scepticism

But it was not just the medical orthodoxy that was sceptical about acupuncture. The BNA "elders" at that time considered that acupuncture was "not naturopathic" and they tried to throw him out of the association for practising it.

When Sidney's solicitor, Leonard Ross, pointed out a clause in the Articles of the association requiring it to defend any of its members threatened with action likely to interfere with earning their livelihood they were faced with having to act against their own edicts and had to withdraw their objections.

The BAA became the leading organisation of acupuncture in the UK and Sidney worked hard to raise its profile, sometimes with outrageous panache.

When the BAA held a congress at the Randolph Hotel, in Oxford, one year in the seventies, he got to hear that the Chinese Charge d'Affaires was arriving at the hotel

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to address a group of Oxford dons in another room. Sidney kidnapped the poor bewildered diplomat, marched him into the conference ballroom and introduced him to the acupuncturists assembled for their annual dinner before returning him to the nonplussed Oxford academics.

While putting acupuncture on the UK map, Sidney was also pursuing another dream: to establish a residential clinic where a broad range of naturopathic treatments could be made available to a wider spectrum of patients than the better-heeled patrons of the hydros of the time. In 1966 he opened the Tyringham Naturopathic Clinic in a magnificent Sir John Soane mansion near Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire, purchased with the help of the Maurice Laing Foundation.

Shoestring

Tyringham was rather a shoestring enterprise in those early days as Sidney struggled to balance a comprehensive menu of naturopathic health care with the basic comforts of a residential hydro.

Patients occasionally suspected that their fasting regimen was based on economic rather than clinical necessity. It necessitated self-discipline but they kept going back and Tyringham survived, and continues to thrive as a therapeutic centre, while many of the other hydros have gone further along the way of all fleshpots.

Together with his colleague, Kenneth Basham, Sidney also set up an import agency for the world famous Madaus herbal preparations.

BioMed Associates (which became Inter-Medics Ltd when taken over by Frank and Lorna Newman Turner in 1963) imported such medicines as Agnolyt, Biral and the Oligoplex range of compound homoeopathic remedies which became the staple prescription items of many naturopaths and herbal practitioners for years to come.

Sidney Rose-Neil's hectic schedule was to take its toll. In 1981 he developed polycythaemia and its natural sequel, a stroke, put an end to his professional life. Despite losing his speech he was able to communicate effectively with colleagues and friends through the skills of his wife, Pat, who was a devoted carer and amanuensis.

He developed the ability to heal with his hands and become an accomplished abstract painter, holding several exhibitions of his work.

Towards the end of last year Sidney's long overtaxed haemopoietic reserves became exhausted and he developed an untreatable leukaemia.

He died peacefully on January 27, secure in the knowledge that acupuncture, which he had nurtured for so long, has become well established as a credible complementary medical system in the UK and that Tyringham continues to be the leading residential centre of naturopathic healthcare.

Roger Newman Turner BAc, ND, DO, MRN, FBAC.

Interview

Professor Derek Bryce-Smith: "I got my chair in orthodox chemistry not by swimming with the current of orthodox belief, but by swimming against."

Pollutants, nutrients and brain function

Jane Dean ND talks to Professor Derek Bryce-Smith about his controversial career which led to a better understanding of the impact of environmental pollutants on the chemical processes involved in human growth, development and mental wellbeing.