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VON  
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Complementary Care: An Assessment of Interest at Trent University.

Prepared for the Victorian Order of Nurses:

VON Centre for Health

and

Professor McGraw

WS 400

Trent University

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## Introduction

This project has been undertaken as a joint endeavour for The Victorian Order of Nurses, and Trent University's Women's Studies 400: Feminist Praxis, and has been facilitated by the Trent Centre for Community Based Education.

The purpose of the project has been to determine interest within the Trent community for the establishment of complementary health care clinics, to be offered at Trent by the VON.

My principle method of data collection was a survey. This was distributed primarily by hand, with some distributed by mail. A total of 77 surveys were completed, of which 63 were by students, and 14 by staff and faculty members of Trent University. Although I was hoping to get a more even representation of both students and staff/faculty, as a student, I had far greater access to the opinions of other students.

Students were chosen at random, and to my knowledge represent a broad range of ages and academic interests. Of the non-students surveyed, there was a fairly even split between staff and faculty members. These were again chosen at random, although there was a slightly higher representation of faculty members from the Women's Studies department, who received the survey in their staff mail-boxes.

In addition to these surveys, I conducted a number of in-depth interviews (some by phone, some in person). These interviews were conducted with staff members of the university from the departments of Student Services, Health Services, Human Resources, and Athletics. These interviews were undertaken in order to gain a greater understanding of the university's current policies towards complementary health care and to assess interest and commitment to expanding existing services, or establishing new services.

## **The VON**

The Victorian Order of Nurses is a not for profit organization which was established in 1897 to respond to the health care needs of Canadians. The VON has been active in Peterborough, Victoria and Haliburton Counties for more than 50 years “providing quality nursing care, home support and specialised services” (VON Complementary Therapies brochure). The innovative and community-based spirit of the VON are well demonstrated in the VON Centre for Health, which has been operating in at 139 Charlotte St. in Peterborough since the summer of 1998.

Among the services offered at the VON Centre for Health are a number of complementary therapies. These include Massage Therapy, Yoga, Meditation, and Therapeutic Touch. In an interest to better serve the community and to expand the use of these services, the VON is interested in offering complementary health care clinics on location at Trent University.

See Appendix 1 (p 20) for a description of the complementary therapies offered at the VON Centre for Health.

## Complementary Health Care

There is no definitive definition for complementary, or alternative therapies (the two terms are used interchangeably). However, these therapies are generally believed to “encompass a broad spectrum of practices and beliefs, and reflect a holistic world view of health and illness that is outside of the biomedical mainstream of medicine.” (Donley, 298).

Interest in complementary, or alternative health care is growing at a phenomenal rate in Canada. In a recent survey undertaken by the Fraser Institute, it was revealed that seventy-three percent of Canadians have used alternative therapies at least once (Buske, 363) and it is estimated that Canadians spend \$3.8 billion annually on alternative health care (Buske, 363). Although some complementary health care services are paid by insurance coverage (private or public), most expenses are paid for by the consumer, demonstrating consumer commitment to these services.

## Results

\*note: not all percentages add up to 100 due to fact that multiple responses were possible for most questions\*

Question		total	%total	students	%students	staff	%staff
1 Are you staff/student?	students	63	82%				
	staff/faculty	14	18%				
2 Do you use any complementary therapies? Which ones?	massage	14	18%	12	19%	2	14%
	reflexology	3	4%	2	3%	1	7%
	therapeutic touch	0	0	0	0%	0	0%
	yoga	10	13%	10	16%	0	0%
	meditation	10	13%	10	16%	0	0%
	other	6	8%	6	10%	0	0%
	none	50	65%	41	65%	9	64%
3 Location of clinic?	Peterborough	8	10%	5	8%	3	21%
	other	13	17%	12	19%	1	7%
	non-clinic	4	5%	4	6%	0	0%
4 Factors limiting use?	lack of interest	12	15%	11	17%	1	7%
	lack of information	25	32%	22	35%	3	21%
	difficult access	14	18%	10	16%	4	29%
	too expensive	36	47%	29	46%	7	50%
	other	7	9%	3	5%	4	29%
5 Interested in learning more about therapies offered by VON?	yes	57	74%	47	75%	10	71%
	no	18	23%	14	22%	4	29%
6 Interested in using VON services at Trent?	yes	65	84%	55	87%	10	71%
	no	18	23%	15	24%	3	21%
	maybe	2	3%	1	2%	1	7%
7 Which therapies are of greatest interest to you?	massage	60	78%	51	80%	9	64%
	reflexology	18	23%	13	21%	5	36%
	therapeutic touch	23	30%	22	35%	1	7%
	yoga	37	48%	33	52%	4	29%
	meditation	20	26%	17	27%	3	21%
	other	3	4%	2	3%	1	7%
8 Would your use of service be dependent on cost?	yes	72	94%	61	97%	11	79%
	no	5	6%	2	3%	3	21%
9 Aware of TCSA & other insurance coverage?	yes	32	42%	26	41%	6	43%
	no	43	56%	37	59%	6	43%
10 Are you effected by stress? How often?	yes, often	34	44%	28	44%	6	43%
	yes, occasionally	37	48%	31	49%	6	43%
	no	7	9%	5	8%	2	14%
11 Are you interested in volunteering with VON?	yes	18	23%	16	25%	2	14%
	no	51	66%	41	65%	10	71%

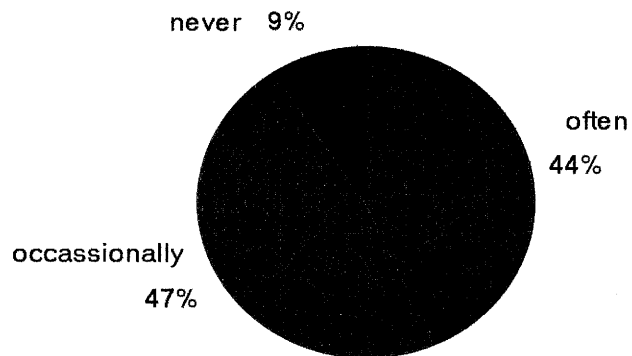
## Stress

It has been recognized that individuals can adapt to living with great amounts of stress, which can effect health and well being (Beer, 53). Stress is unavoidable for most people, especially stress in the workplace. A recent national survey has discovered that 25% of Canadians feel that their workplace is a major source of stress and anxiety in their lives (Simpson). Stress is also a major issue for university students who are constantly striving to fulfil academic, personal and economic demands. Times of transition and insecurity also foster stress. This is evident at Trent today as the university struggles to thrive despite economic cutbacks.

The majority of my survey respondents felt that they are effected by stress. Question #10 asked : “Do you believe that your well-being, happiness and/or productivity are compromised due to excessive stress?”. Forty-four percent of respondents indicated that they are often negatively effected by stress. Forty-eight percent of respondents felt that they were occasionally compromised by stress, and only nine percent of respondents felt that their well-being, happiness and/or productivity are never compromised by stress.



Figure 1 - frequency that well-being, happiness and/or productivity are compromised due to excessive stress.



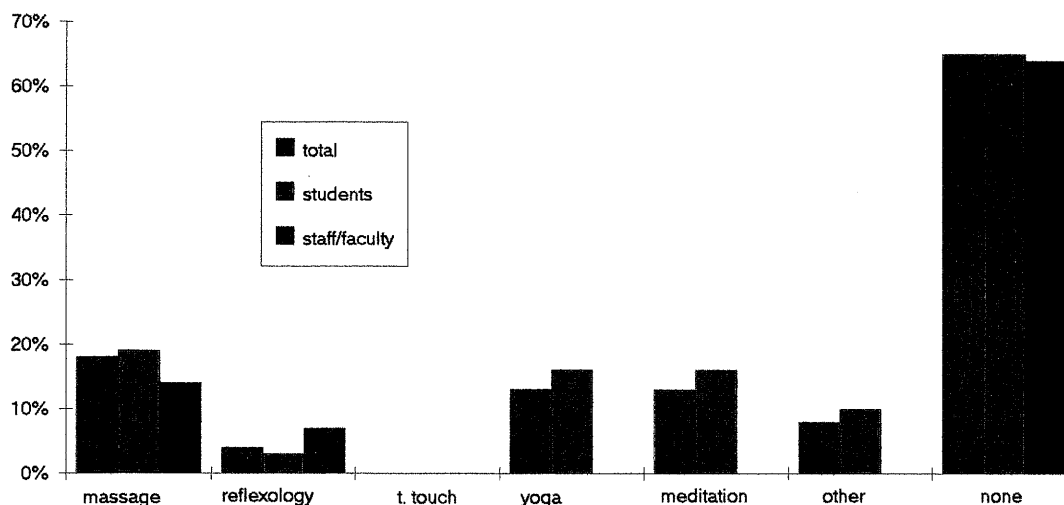
Many complementary therapies are effective for reducing stress and the negative effects of stress. Many employers are now incorporating complementary therapy clinics into the workplace in order to reduce stress and workplace related injuries and to promote productivity and well-being among employees (Ramsay).

### Current Use of Complementary Therapies

Question #2 “Do you make use of any complementary therapies? If so, please indicate which one(s), and your frequency of use...” was designed to gauge student, staff and faculty members’ current use of complementary therapies. While a total of sixty-five percent of respondents reported no use of complementary therapies, this indicates that forty-five percent of respondents do use a variety of complementary therapies. Frequently, individuals will be using a combination of more than one type of therapy.

The graph show little variation in the number of users of each therapy in each category (total number of users, total number of student users, and total number of staff/faculty users). This indicates that usage of these therapies is fairly consistent among students and non-students. Some categories, such as ‘yoga’, ‘mediation’ and ‘other’ have no users among staff/faculty. This could be indicative of the small number of staff and faculty surveyed. The only category with no users is therapeutic touch.

Figure 2 - current use of complementary therapies



Frequency of use varied considerably. For massage therapy, respondents indicated that they receive this treatment as little as once a year, and up to four times a year. Yoga was used more frequently, from monthly, to daily. Meditation was similarly practised, from monthly, to daily, or only when particularly stressed.

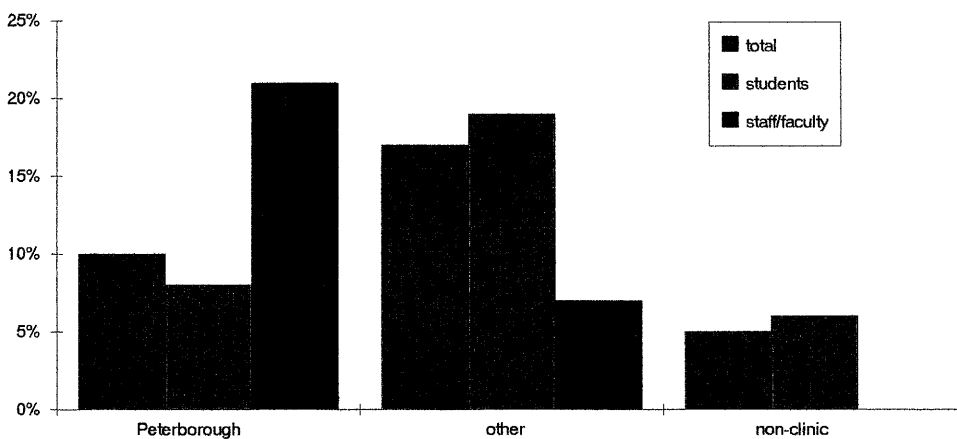
Other complementary therapies that are used by respondents include: homeopathy, aromatherapy, reiki, and chiropractic.

### Clinic Location

Question #3 *“If you are currently using any of these therapies, please indicate the location of the clinic you frequent.”* The purpose of this question was to determine if complementary care users are attending clinics in Peterborough, or if they are frequenting clinics elsewhere.

Of the total number of respondents, ten percent are using clinics in Peterborough. The percentage of staff and faculty using Peterborough clinics is high (21%) compared to the percentage of students using Peterborough clinics (8%). This could be because many professors live full-time in Peterborough whereas many students maintain home-bases elsewhere, where the majority of their health care practitioners are likely to be located. This indicates that although complementary care services are offered in Peterborough, perhaps these are not accessible to students. If this is the case, complementary health care clinics offered on campus could be popular among students, staff and faculty who frequent clinics outside of Peterborough.

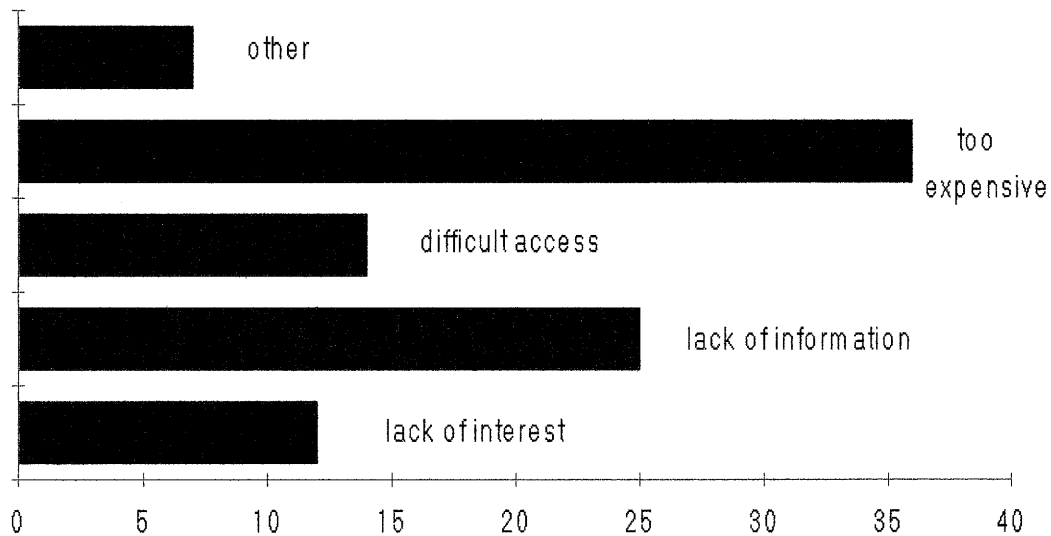
Figure 3 - location of complementary therapy clinic



### Factors limiting use of complementary care therapies

Question #4: *“If you are not currently using any complementary therapies, what factors are limiting your use?”* This question is to determine what factors are limiting use of complementary therapies.

Figure 4- factors limiting use of complementary therapies



#### Cost

The most prominent reason given for the limited use of complementary therapies is that they are too expensive. This reason was given by forty-seven percent of respondents. In a subsequent question (#8), ninety-four percent of respondents indicated that their use of complementary care services would be dependent on their cost.

The following are comments written by students in regards to the cost of complementary therapies:

*“Money is a huge issue for students - most of whom struggle to feed themselves. Because of this, it would be necessary to have these complementary therapies subsidised”*

*“...way too expensive for students...not at all accessible”*

*“Even though I do use [complementary therapies], I would use more if I could afford more”*

These comments reflect the concerns of students in regards to the costs of complementary care. These concerns seem to be equally reflected in responses from staff/faculty members.

### Health Insurance Coverage

Although some complementary therapies are covered by insurance plans, coverage is minimal and is usually restricted to particular therapies. The university health insurance plan for staff and faculty members is through Sun Life Insurance. This plan covers \$200 of massage therapy, and \$300 of chiropractic (beyond OHIP coverage). However, the plan indicates that coverage “includes but is not limited to the following...” indicating that additional services may be covered if recommended by a doctor.

The Trent Central Student Association (TCSA) offers a health insurance plan through Clarica Life Insurance Company to full time Trent students. This plan covers some complementary therapies. These are: Massage Therapy- \$30 per visit with an annual maximum of \$500; Chiropractor- \$30 per visit up to \$500 annually; and Naturopath- \$30 per visit with an annual maximum of \$500. These services must be recommended by a doctor to be covered by the insurance provider.

Many other health insurance plans have similar policies. Few people are aware of this type of coverage. When surveyed, only forty-two percent of respondents indicated knowledge of TCSA and other insurance coverage for complementary care therapies.

### Lack of information

The second most prominent reason given for limited use of complementary therapies is lack of information. This reason was given by 32% of respondents. This is indicative of the fact that these therapies are really 'up and coming'. While they have become increasingly popular in recent years, their popularity is likely to continue to grow over the next few years.

### Difficult access to services

Difficult access to services was the third most popular reason for limited use of complementary therapies (18% of respondents). This demonstrates the potential for clinics at Trent, which would be highly accessible to students, faculty and staff.

### Lack of interest

Fifteen percent of respondents did not use complementary therapies due to a lack of interest. This again may be reflective of the limited information widely available about the benefits of complementary therapies.

### Other factors limiting use

Nine percent of respondents listed other reasons for limited use of complementary therapies. These reasons include lack of time, no need, and the need for evening clinic hours to accommodate full-time work.

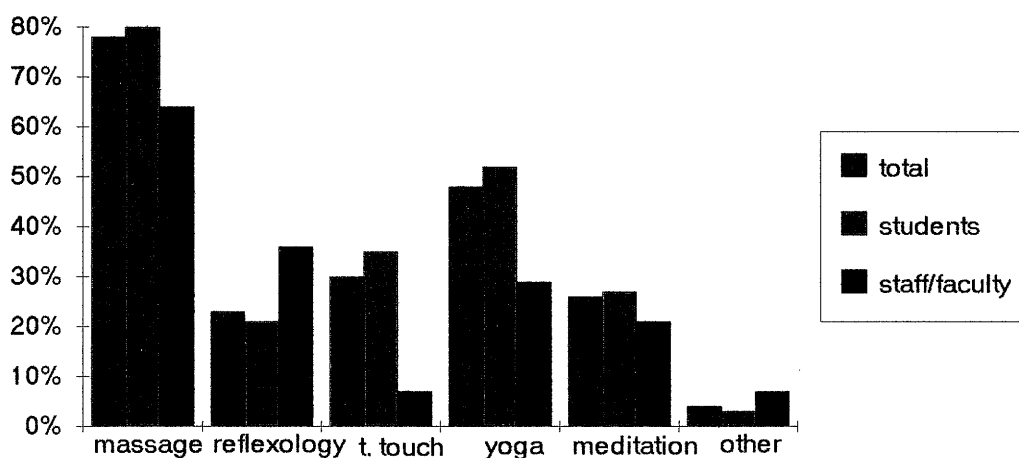


## Interest in complementary therapies

### Survey Results

Seventy-four percent of those surveyed indicated that they would be interested in learning more about complementary therapies offered by the VON (Question #5). Eighty-four percent of respondents indicated that they would be interested in using complementary therapy clinics if they were offered by the VON at Trent (Question #6).

Figure 5 - interest in therapies by type



### Interest in particular therapies

Respondents were asked which therapies they would be most interested in learning about, and using, if they were offered on campus. Of those suggested, massage therapy was by far the most popular. Seventy-eight percent of total respondents were interested in massage therapy.

Yoga was second (30%), followed by meditation (26%) and reflexology (23%). There were slight variations in interests between students and faculty/staff. These differences may be due in part to the small number of faculty and staff who were surveyed.

Other therapies that were of interest to respondents were aromatherapy, and chiropractic.

### Interview Results

Students, staff and faculty members who were surveyed were overwhelmingly interested in complementary care, and expressed interest in having complementary care clinics at Trent. However, the majority of the university representatives that I interviewed did not see the implementation of complementary therapy clinics as a feasible option for the university.

A representative from Health Services agreed that there was “absolutely” a need for complimentary care, and that Health Services doctors often give referrals for massage therapy, chiropractic, and nutritional counselling. However, she felt that these services are easily accessible in the community, and that the implementation of such services would be very difficult at Trent due to a lack of space within the university, and a lack of funds to develop any additional programmes.

A representative from Human Resources similarly emphasized the lack of space and money at the university. He stated that if space were available, the VON could lease this,

entering into a landlord-tenant agreement with the university. However, if space were provided by the university, as a public institution Trent would have to accept and consider business proposals from other service providers.

Furthermore, this representative from Human Resources saw little need to implement pro-active health care initiatives as the university has a very low incidence of workplace related injuries. However, this does not take into consideration lowered productivity, or days lost to causes such as excessive stress, or chronic conditions, which some complementary therapies may be able to alleviate.

A representative from Athletics did recognize the demand for some complementary therapies. However, he felt that these demands were being adequately met within the community, and through initiatives already being undertaken by the Athletics Complex. For instance, massage therapy is periodically offered for free by massage therapy students from Sir Sandford Flemming College. He indicated that there is some demand for yoga, but he is wary of instructors' professionalism as the Athletic Complex has had some non-professional tai-chi instructors in the past. He was also concerned about insurance coverage for practitioners.

## Conclusions

I believe that there is a significant demand and need among Trent students, staff and faculty members for complementary therapy clinics on location at Trent. While forty-five percent of those surveyed are currently using at least one form of complementary care, only ten percent of respondents are frequenting clinics in Peterborough. This indicates that although there are a number of complementary care clinics in Peterborough, these are being under utilised by the Trent community.

Major factors limiting use include cost (47%), lack of information (32%), difficult access to services (18%) and lack of interest (15%).

Despite these limiting factors, seventy-four percent of respondents are interested in learning more about complementary therapies offered by the VON, and eighty-four percent of respondents would be interested in using complementary therapy clinics if these were established at Trent.

However, major factors impeding the creation of such clinics at Trent are lack of available space, as well as lack of funds to implement these services.

Therefore, if space were made available, and either the VON or Trent had the necessary capital to establish on site-clinics, these would likely be popular if they were offered at

prices that clients could afford. This would either necessitate increased insurance coverage, or subsidized fees.

Since interest in complementary therapies does exist among students, staff and faculty members, the VON could continue to research the feasibility of establishing complementary therapy clinics at Trent and enter negotiations with the university in regards to these services.

If the establishment of on-site clinics is not possible, the VON could increase promotion of the VON Centre For Health as there is demonstrated interest in complementary care therapies. There was also some interest among survey respondents in volunteering for the VON.

## Appendix 1

Description of complementary therapies offered at the VON Centre for Health

*Therapeutic Touch*  
*Yoga & Meditation*  
*Massage Therapy*



*Complementary*  
*Therapies*

for the Mind, Body & Spirit

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- Increasing Wound, Burn and Bone Healing
- Indigestion
- Insomnia
- Pain Management
- Post Traumatic Stress
- Pre-Menstrual  
& Menstrual Concerns
- Prostate Problems
- Providing Comfort to the Terminally Ill
- Reducing Stress/Anxiety
- Relief of Pain
- Respiratory Problems
- Scalp Problems
- Sinusitis
- Skin Disorders
- Soothing Women in Childbirth
- Strengthening the Body's Own Healing  
Resources, etc.



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