



Aromatherapists in France

by Andy McKee MAAPA

In 2001, I moved to France armed with the excitement of moving to a country I loved and a diploma in Clinical Aromatherapy from Essential Care Training then based in Croydon. I thought Aromatherapy practitioners would be welcome anywhere and certainly in France where healthcare is one of the nation's priorities. That was before I learned about French bureaucracy. English friends who had moved to France some years before explained to my husband and myself that the nation is run by concessionaires. These folk keep themselves employed by passing pieces of paper back and forth to each other and EVERYTHING that needs official sanction of any kind needs several bits of paper -the more bits of paper the better. We were daunted. We wanted to abide by the rules and make ourselves welcome in France. WHAT bits of paper"??? Depends on the request!!

Everyone in France carries a photo ID card and will get fined if, when asked by the police to produce one for inspection, they cannot. Everything is regulated. Everything "metier" as a governmental department that needs to know that you exist, your qualifications, your address and preferably your "regime fiscale".

After a few years of settling in and living the good life, I wanted to start practicing my aroma therapy. With the help of a French friend well-versed in France's bureaucracy having worked in trade unions for many years and currently serving as a justice of the peace, I learned that the practice of Aromatherapy falls between 2 metiers, that of Kinestherapie and the practice of the l'Estheticien, who are beauticians. Both use essential oils in their treatments and are licensed to do so. However, no one in France holds an equivalent to my diploma in Aromatherapy. In fact, there are no aromatherapists specifically practicing Aromatherapy in France. I also would need to join an association or trade union.

I was not able to be accepted by any association of neither Kinestherapists nor Estheticien in France as my diploma and therefore qualification was unknown to them. I needed governmental permission at some level to practice. As I fell between 2 practices, this was also impossible. If I attempted to practice on my own, even if got insurance, my name would be added to a national register of those who flouted the rules and would never be allowed to practice Aromatherapy at any level in France. In fact, there is a committee of senators whose job it is to find, expose and punish complementary health practitioners they consider to be charlatans. They are gaining in power and consider all new therapies and therapists suspect. Scary stuff!

However, if I could get a Kinestherapie practice to let me work alongside them, this would be allowed (!) and I would be covered by the practice's insurance. If I could do this for 3 years, I would be accepted and allowed to set up on my own. So logic didn't seem to intrude. I knocked on as many doors as possible within a reasonable radius of where we lived with no success. Lots of sympathy but no success.

Another alternative would be to study another therapy in France and add aromatherapy to the list of treatments I could offer. After expensive research, greatly aided by an excellent back-to-work programme funded by the Pole Emploi, the French Unemployment Agency, a therapy called Sophrology immediately appealed.

Sophrology is the practice of dynamic relaxation. There are one or two practitioners in the UK, French-trained and one is actually French. The most realistically-priced course would take a year of study in Paris, one weekend every month and cost 3500 euro. Sophrology is extremely interesting and I sincerely hope I will be able to qualify as a sophrologist. Part of my back-to-work programme was to interview other sophrologists and discuss how they qualified, how their practice was going, how economically-feasible was it, etc. All very thorough and a superb method of coming to a life-changing decision.

I am not eligible for government funding to pursue my studies as the government department in charge of disbursing the funds don't consider it sufficiently important to spend government funds on. While they readily recognise that stress is a killer, conventional medicine is still the main source of treatments.

So, the bottom line for me is to raise the necessary funding to become a sophrologist. THEN I can practice Aromatherapy in France. In the meantime, I am teaching English as a Second Language and keeping my membership of the AAPA current.

I would like to thank Joyce and Lawrence West for their continuing support and friendship during all the years since I qualified and wish them every success in their efforts to confirm the AAPA and its high standards as a benchmark of quality and trust in the practices of Complementary Therapies.

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