

Anthroposophic Medicine in Ann Arbor ~

A Visit with Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird and Dr. Quentin McMullen, and a Look at the Anthroposophic Approach to Healing and Health Care

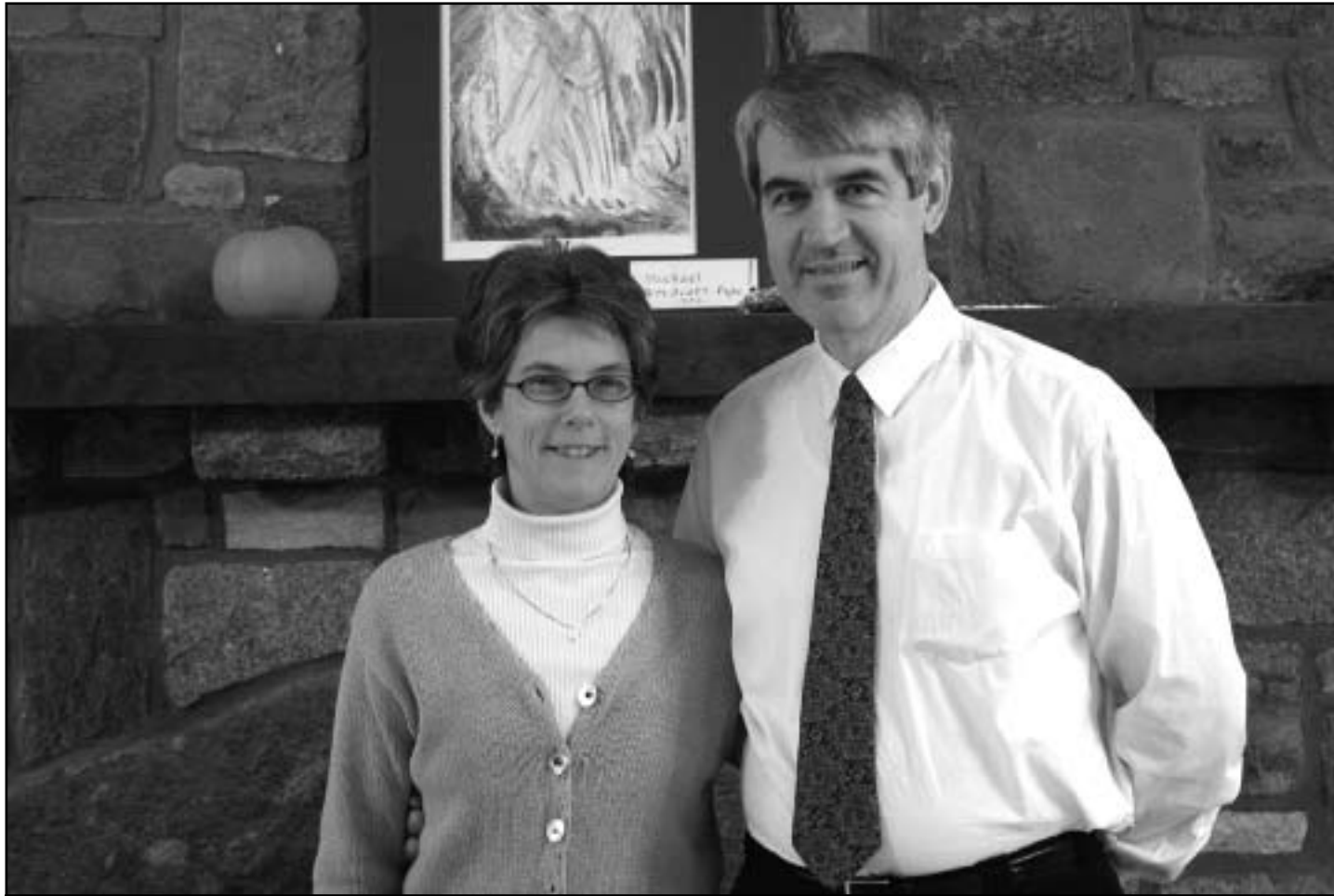


Photo by Kris Doten

Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird and Dr. Quentin McMullen practice Anthroposophic Medicine at the in-patient Rudolf Steiner Health Center (on West Liberty), and at a CSAM out-patient clinic (on West Stadium).

By Lani Kwon Meilgaard

If you're like me, after reading the title above, you're probably asking yourself, "What the heck is anthroposophic medicine?" I knew "anthro-" means man, and "-sophic" means study, so it had to do with medicine related to study about human beings, but beyond that I was a complete novice.

According to the Physicians' Association for Anthroposophic Medicine: "Anthroposophic medicine works with the idea, intrinsic to most healing traditions, that in addition to physical matter the human being contains life force, soul, and spirit. Anthroposophic medicine seeks to understand each medicinal plant and mineral substance qualitatively, via a contemplative approach to nature, which adds much to the conventional materialistic view of pharmacology. Anthroposophic physicians view illness in the context of their patient's life path, seeking to support each patient's full individuality." Thus, anthroposophic medicine provides a complementary, holistic approach to standard Western medicine, which often misses out on the spiritual component in healing and health care. Moreover, anthroposophic medicine focuses on more than an individual's diagnosis and standard medical treatment. Anthroposophic doctors see patients in the larger context of their environment and life purpose.

I first heard about anthroposophic medicine when Mara Gibson, Secretary of the Board of Directors of Community Supported Anthroposophic Medicine (CSAM), contacted Crazy Wisdom by letter last spring. She asked if we might consider interviewing Dr. Quentin McMullen and Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird, who have been practicing in Ann Arbor for over a decade. Both doctors specialize in Internal Medicine, were trained in Western medicine and are MDs. Molly earned her medical degree from Tulane School of Medicine in New Orleans, and Quentin received his medical degree from Louisiana State University School of Medicine. They also received

additional on-the-job training with the U.S. Air Force while stationed in Bitburg, Germany, as well as specialized training in anthroposophical medicine in Switzerland. In addition, Molly worked at the Ita Wegman Klinik in Arlesheim, Switzerland and Quentin trained at the Filderklinik in Germany and the Lukas Klinik in Switzerland. These experiences provided the foundation for what would later become the two parts of their anthroposophical medicine practices. Their out-patient clinic, the Community Supported Anthroposophical Medicine is a not-for-profit organization with a membership that has grown from 37 in 1997 to approximately 100 members currently, providing health care services with a focus on education and prevention for about 250 people in our community. The Rudolf Steiner Health Center, an in-patient "complementary and standard medical treatment" center, offers two- or three-week health retreats.

I initially visited the McMullens' in-patient facility while it was out of session in late-July. The Rudolf Steiner Health Center is located at the Anna Botsford Bach home, a three-story Victorian structure in the historic West Side of Ann Arbor. It was pouring down with rain the day I stopped by, and I was grateful for the opportunity to chat in the cozy surroundings of the retreat center. Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird greeted me first at the door, mentioning that her husband was running slightly late but would soon join us. I assured her that I was early and didn't mind jotting down some notes while I waited. Molly is a savvy, down-to-earth kind of woman. She has short, brown hair and dresses comfortably, and she evokes an immediate sense of competence. She gave me a tour of the first floor of the center, in which most of the anthroposophical healing therapies take place when in session.

There is an alcove at the entrance, where people can remove their shoes and borrow a pair of embroidered, cotton slippers. Velvet and brocade upholstered furnishings and oak wood paneling give the impression of visiting someone's well-cared-for stately home. She showed me first to the library, where patients can relax, read and

research information related to healing and Rudolf Steiner, a visionary Austrian scientist and philosopher who lived between 1861-1925 and who created anthroposophical medicine, among other groundbreaking ideas. There is a small store stocked with books, postcards, homeopathic treatments and biodynamic, all-natural body-care products by Weleda and Dr. Hauschka that the McMullens prescribe for their patients. (Biodynamics is a Steiner-inspired agricultural system in which the farm is viewed as a living organism that can support itself with farming practices that honor the natural rhythms of the environment, plants and soil.) There is also a portrait of philanthropist Anna Botsford Bach in this room above one of the bookcases. According to the retreat center materials, "Dr. McKenzie, an obstetrician, built the Anna Botsford Bach home in 1916. The building was then purchased by Anna Botsford Bach in 1927 and used as a home for elderly women until 2002, i.e. 75 years of service!" The McMullens purchased the house in June 2003 and have since then offered retreats for "ambulatory individuals with chronic illnesses, or anyone seeking a restorative regimen" with the goal of eventually operating a full-time facility.

There is a healing, relaxing feeling about the house, a sense of peace and restfulness. The living room, across and up the hall from the library, features a piano and furnishings gathered into a circular arrangement.

Everyone in the retreat gathers here each morning after breakfast to sing in harmony. Some patients are prescribed music therapy later in the day, which focuses on "harmonizing the activities of inner organs through directed listening and playing on therapeutic instruments;" and/or therapeutic eurythmy and spacial dynamics, a method "using archetypal and focused movement to harmonize and strengthen the body and soul." Dr. Quentin McMullen joined us at this point in the tour, and I had a chance to talk with him about his experience as a doctor at the retreat center, CSAM and the Rudolf Steiner School, where he is also the school physician. Quentin has a calm, reassuring presence, as well as an easy-going nature that conveys confidence in his work. Like Molly, he was dressed casually in slacks and a long-sleeved shirt. He told me, "Though relatively new in the United States, anthroposophic medicine has been practiced in Europe in hospitals and out-patient clinics by fully trained medical doctors for over eighty years. The Rudolf Steiner Health Center was modeled on the Lukas Klinik in Arlesheim, Switzerland."

The art room, at the end of the hall, has large windows, allowing in natural light, and is where artistic and color-light therapy are offered. In artistic therapy each patient uses drawing, watercolor painting and/or clay modeling in a prescribed way that focuses on the process, rather than the end product, to encourage healing. In the color-light therapy patients are exposed to color and light to encourage "strengthening the soul." According to their brochure, another anthroposophical healing method called speech formation therapy involves "transforming the breath and discovering the inner life of speech through rhythmical speech exercises." Thus, anthroposophical medical therapies focus not only on the physical bodies of the patients, but also on the emotional, mental, and most importantly, the spiritual or soul parts of the whole.

In alignment with this philosophy, the McMullens realized that designing an effective in-patient recovery program would involve healthy daily routines, such as the patients eating nutritious foods and the staff using environmentally-friendly cleaning products. The dining room, to the left at the end of the hall, is where organic, biodynamic meals, prepared by cooks trained by Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird, are served three times a day when the retreat center is in session. Molly most closely follows the Lukas Klinik diet plan for cancer patients because it is largely vegetarian, easily digestible and highly nutritious, and she also uses several recipes that were passed down in her family. Staff use only biodegradable and perfume-free laundry and cleaning agents in the center. Each patient receives specialized anthroposophic nursing by supervised staff, including treatments such as “compresses, nursing massage and footbaths,” and each patient has an individualized schedule, ongoing visits with their doctor and a prescribed treatment plan, unique to their recoveries. Evening lectures on anthroposophic medicine, nursing, food and nutrition, as well as community and social events, such as concerts, round out the schedule.

Later, in early August, I visited the Community Supported Anthroposophic Medicine (CSAM) out-patient clinic on West Stadium. The CSAM is a modest one-story, brick building with a massive skylight in the center, providing natural light over the reception desk. The lobby featured a tropical fish tank in the lobby and magazines such as National Geographic, Smithsonian and Lilipoh: the Spirit in Life, a quarterly publication dedicated to the anthroposophical approach to health and living. The aroma of healing herbs, like yarrow and lavender, drifting from the pharmacy and small store adjacent to the lobby gave the place the familiar, comforting feeling. There were chairs in the waiting room along the wall for adults, while a play area with child-sized chairs and a table was set up for children. Molly and Quentin said that when they first opened the practice, “members of the patient organization donated many of the furnishings, almost like a community barn-raising.” This gives the lobby a homey feeling.

The building used to be pediatrician Dr. Graves’ office and, like the Rudolf Steiner Health Center, it has the historical ambiance of a supportive, healing place. Additionally, it is carpeted with interface carpet tiles made from recycled carpeting, which ensures that they are eco-friendly and do not give off harmful gases that could harm chemically-sensitive patients. The McMullens consulted with architect Robert Black of Sun Structures, who also designed the Leslie Science Center, when redesigning the facility to fit their patients’ needs. The building houses examination rooms painted with “lazure” paintings, a Steiner technique, using pastel washes of color. There are also shelves for the medical records, storage space for medicines, herbal infusions and treatments, an infusion room with three recliners for those patients receiving treatments for cancer, a kitchen, bathrooms at either end of the back hall and a laboratory/storage room. I found the out-patient location to be inviting and comfortable, and I was honored to sign their guest book at the end of that visit.

In October I was delighted to be invited back to the in-patient Rudolf Steiner Health Center for the final day of an autumn retreat that was in session. I had an opportunity to talk with qualified staff and several patients, who were very generous with their time and personal stories. In the interest of maintaining the patients’ privacy, I asked how each person would like to be identified in this article, and most opted for first name and last initial. They had all signed release forms upon entry into the retreat, but I also wanted to respect those who did not wish to be inter-



Photo by Kris Doten

Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird and her daughter, Sara McMullen-Laird, who is an Art Therapist, talking with a patient at the Rudolf Steiner Health Center.

viewed and who preferred to focus on their own healing and recoveries while at the center.

I joined the staff and patients for morning coffee and later for a delicious, organic, biodynamic lunch. Tony B. was recovering from side effects of standard chemotherapy. “The caring of the physicians has been important to my recovery.” He added, “The soul is also important; the artistic pursuits help in recovery.” Barry S., recovering from two strokes, said, “It was a long road to recovery.” He has been to the Rudolf Steiner Health Center eleven times in the past four years, and his wife, Lynn, who was visiting, said he has made tremendous progress. While most of the patients at the center are recovering from chronic illnesses or injury, some participants are seeking a relaxing health retreat. As Robert H. explained, “I came mostly for the relaxation and rejuvenation and out of curiosity.”

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The McMullens’ children, Sara, 25, Lydia, 19, and Samuel, 12, sometimes help their parents at the center or CSAM. That day both Lydia and Sara were there, Lydia was helping in the kitchen and serving breakfast and lunch, and Sara was facilitating the singing of rounds such as To Stop the Train, Jubilate Deo and Dona Nobis Pacem. At first I felt

a bit shy, but I soon found it was a fun, uplifting experience to sing with the others. After reciting a verse, which blessed the house and the people in it, each of the patients followed schedules specifically designed for their individual recoveries, while I settled in the hall and then the library, making myself available to those who wished to be interviewed.

Judy H. shared, “I didn’t feel well a good bit of the summer, and there didn’t seem to be any particular medical diagnosis. I wanted to address what I assumed were issues of stress.” She added, “I didn’t want to work with someone who saw my body as a mechanical machine. I wanted someone who could address body, soul and mind holistically.” Anne B. generously showed me what she did during eurythmy therapy and told me, “Eurythmy is from the Greek word, which means ‘beautiful movement’. Everybody innately has this quality within him or her. They just have to bring it out. It’s visible speech and visible music, a healthy form of movement.” Shondeyá,

who was recovering from chronic fatigue syndrome, migraines and the side effects of prescription medications she had been taking for years, said, “I would say that you get the best of both worlds with anthroposophical medicine. In all the therapies here, the soul and spirit is key.”

Finally, Kay R., who preferred not to reveal why she was at the retreat, said, “My overall impression is that this center offers an environment and services that are unique in the United States.” Based on her own experience with both standard medical care and complementary anthroposophic medicine, she added, “If I wanted to communicate to people who were trying to decide what to do with their own therapies, I would say to them that modern medicine, as it is practiced today, includes practices that are major assaults on the body. The immune system can be compromised, especially with chemotherapy or radiation. People need to understand that, instead of getting on the conveyor belt of ‘best practices and standard of care’, what’s provided in anthroposophical medicine is complementary, that means you’re not choosing between conventional therapies or alternative therapies. You can have both. People need to know that.”

Thank you to Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird and Dr. Quentin McMullen, as well as the staff and the patients at the Rudolf Steiner Health Center health retreat I visited for sharing their experiences. Thank you Community Supported Anthroposophic Medicine (CSAM) for offering us professional, caring holistic medicine in alignment with our mind-body-spirit Crazy Wisdom community.

(Dr. Quentin McMullen and Dr. Molly McMullen-Laird can be contacted at (734) 222-1491 for the out-patient Community Supported Anthroposophic Medicine (CSAM). The CSAM address is 1825 West Stadium; their e-mail address there is CSAMMed@earthlink.net. The CSAM Patient Organization is still accepting new members. Memberships are sliding scale: \$100 to \$70 per month for a family membership and \$55 to \$35 per month for individual memberships.

The in-patient Rudolf Steiner Health Center is located at the Anna Botsford Bach home, located at 1422 West Liberty; the e-mail for that location is RSHC@earthlink.net and the phone number is (734) 663-4365. Retreat rates vary based on single- or double occupancy, length of stay and include meals, accommodation and anthroposophical medical treatments and therapies prescribed by the doctors. As of publication, the two-week health retreats on February 11th to 23rd or April 28th to May 10th, 2008 at RHSC are \$4350 double occupancy and \$4935 single occupancy. See their website at www.SteinerHealth.org for more information.)