

PRESENTATION

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**MEASURING THE
EFFECTS OF FOREST
SPA PROGRAMME IN
URBAN PARKS USING
ACTIVE IMAGINATION**

ABSTRACT: Nature has been shown to be beneficial to our overall health and well-being. We are all connected to nature and it is important to maintain this vital connection for our health and well-being. Spending time outside in nature or urban parks has been shown to positively affect a person's emotions and improve their sense of well-being. Access to nature balances circadian rhythms, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress and increases absorption of Vitamin D. Increasingly, evidence demonstrates that contact with the living world around us is an important part of healing and recovery. The natural world's role in human well-being is an essential, yet often forgotten, aspect of healthcare. Of particular importance are the benefits one can derive through interaction with natural environments. Reincorporating the natural world is practiced to move healthcare toward being more "green". Spiritual well-being is enhanced through the experience of greater interconnections, and it occurs when interacting with the natural world. One study examined the physiological and psychological responses to real forest landscapes

as well as the therapeutic uses of forests relative to urban environments.

Lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol have been reported in adults subsequent to performing the same mental activities in a garden setting vs. an indoor classroom. A separate study involving over 11,000 adults from Denmark showed that living more than 1 km away from green space (forests, parks, beaches, lakes) were 42 percent more likely to report high stress and had the worst scores on evaluations of general health, vitality, mental health and bodily pain. The landscape itself offers retreat from daily routine. The aim of our research was to measure the effects of Forest SPA programs on attendants' well-being. Research has been organized in cooperation between Health college Belgrade and Medical SPA Association of Serbia. There were fourteen participants taking part in the research. Prior to Forest SPA program all participants, 14 students on specialization in Medical Wellness were invited to half-an-hour active imagination (mandala drawing) workshop. Drawing Mandala is a meditation in motion,

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dreaming with open eyes, and during the process of active imagination the unconscious self is active and not passive like in dreams. Using the data and research methodology from Henderson's *Empirical Study of the Healing Nature of Artistic Expression* we designed our investigation. After 90 minutes of Forest SPA program in selected Urban park, participants were invited to draw mandala to describe how they feel at that moment. Several participants (8 of them) attended a 90-minute City SPA program with Tibetan bowls vibration massage. At the end of the SPA program they were invited to draw mandala. Analyzing symbols and colors, number of symbols and their relationship in presented mandalas we can realize the effects of the Forest SPA programs in urban parks on achieving better emotional balance and enhancing individualization process in participants. Our pilot research of Active imagination (by drawing mandalas) revealed that it can be used as a part of Forest SPA program as ART therapy and at the same time as an instrument for individual approach to the client of Forest SPA program as a medical SPA concept.

KEY WORDS: forest SPA, active imagination, mandala

BACKGROUND

Nature has been shown to be beneficial to our overall health and well-being. We are all connected to nature and it is important to maintain this vital connection for our health and well-being.

Spending time outside in nature or urban parks has been shown to positively affect a person's emotions and improve their sense of well-being. Access to nature balances circadian rhythms lowers blood pressure, reduces stress and increases absorption of Vitamin D. (Nisbet EK, Zelenski JM, Murphy SA (2011), "Happiness is in our nature: Exploring

nature relatedness as a contributor to subjective well-being". *Journal of Happiness Stud.*, 12: 303-322.)

Increasingly, evidence demonstrates that contact with the living world around us is an important part of healing and recovery.

The natural world's role in human well-being is an essential, yet often forgotten, aspect of healthcare. Of particular importance are the benefits one can derive through interaction with natural environments. Reincorporating the natural world is practiced to move healthcare toward being more "green". (Sijtsma FJ, de Vries S, van Hinsberg A, Diederiks J (2012), "Does 'grey' living lead to more 'green' holiday nights? A Netherlands case study". *Landscape Urban Plan.*)

Spiritual well-being is enhanced through the experience of greater interconnections, which occurs when interacting with the natural world.

One study examined the physiological and psychological responses to real forest landscapes as well as the therapeutic uses of forests relative to urban environments. (Logan AC, Selhub EM (2012), "Vis medicatrix naturae: Does nature 'minister to the mind'?" *Biopsychosoc Med.*, 6: 11.)

Lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol have been reported in adults subsequent to performing the same mental activities in a garden setting vs. an indoor classroom. (Li Q, Kobayashi M, Kawada T (2008), "Relationships between percentage of forest coverage and standardized mortality ratios (SMR) of cancers in all prefectures in Japan". *Open Pub Health J.*, 1: 1-7.)

The landscape itself offers retreat from daily routine. (Isailovic G, Presetnik Lj, Jovanovic I, Sipka Lj, Vidovic V (2016), "Landscape therapy and quality of life", Case Study Meteora Greece. *Balkan Wellbeing* book, in press.)

The aim of our research was to measure the effects of Forest SPA programmes on attendants' well-being. Research has been organized in cooperation of Health college Belgrade and Medical SPA

Association of Serbia. There were fourteen participants taking part in the research.

Art therapy, using the method of active imagination can at the same time lead to the individual approach to the client. Individual approach to the client is an essential part of any medical SPA programme and particularly programme of forest SPA. Art therapy as active imagination has several modalities (drawing mandala, modelling in clay, collage creating, performing sculptures from the stones, branches, leaves or sand).

Discovering the world of mandalas, CG Jung named drawing mandala as Active imagination. And what is mythopoetic imagination? Is it delusion, or the doorway to a lost dimension of reality. (Owens LS (2014), *Carl Gustav Jung and the Red Book*, Encyclopedia of psychology and religion, 2nd edition. Springer Reference.)

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Prior to Forest SPA programme all participants, 14 students on specialisation in Medical Wellness were invited to a half-hour active imagination (mandala drawing) workshop.

Drawing Mandala is a meditation in motion, dreaming with open eyes, and during the process of active imagination the unconscious self is active and not passive like in dreams. Using the data and research methodology from Henderson's Empirical Study we designed our investigation. (Patti Gail

Henderson (2012), "Empirical study of the healing nature of artistic expression: Using mandalas with the positive emotions of love and joy", a dissertation. M.S., Texas A&M University.)

After 90 minutes of Forest SPA programme in selected Urban park (Arboretum), participants were invited to draw a mandala to describe how they feel at that moment.

Several participants (8 of them) attended a 90-minute City SPA programme with Tibetan bowls vibration massage. At the end of the SPA programme, they were invited to draw a mandala.

DISCUSSION

Through the analysis of symbols and colours, number of symbols and their relationship in presented mandalas we can realize the effects of the Forest SPA programmes in urban parks on achieving better emotional balance and promotion of individualisation process in participants.

CONCLUSION

Our pilot research of active imagination method (by drawing mandalas) revealed that it can be used as a part of Forest SPA programme as ART therapy and at the same time as an instrument for individual approach to the client of Forest SPA programme as a medical SPA concept.

LITERATURE

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