

***RUSSIAN EXPRESS* NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS NATHAN GENDELMAN**

The following interview appeared in the October 13, 2006 issue of the *Russian Express*. Michael Berman of the *Russian Express* conducted the interview with Nathan Gendelman, the Founder and Director of the Health In Motion Rehabilitation Centre in Toronto. Mr. Gendelman discusses his training, his rehabilitation centre in Toronto, and his own recovery from serious injury.

I HELP PEOPLE HEAL THEMSELVES

Russian Express, Michael Berman: Nathan, today we are talking about a therapist's authority and reputation. As we know, one does not make mistakes only if one does not do anything.

Nathan Gendelman, Health In Motion: I have been lucky – I have trained with good teachers. A health care practice is built on reputation – this is a truth to be remembered. The difference between a health care practice and any other business is that human health and life are at stake in the former. As odd as it may sound, there is always some selfishness in the desire to help and, often, return a patient to good health. Success will raise one's reputation and failure will diminish one's previous achievements.

Our Centre's reputation is grounded in the professionalism of all our employees, and their ability to improve our clients' health.

Speaking of employees, I am not referring to therapists only. As the saying goes, any theatre begins in the cloakroom, and contact with Health in Motion begins at the reception desk. The first call from a potential client is very important to us. Our receptionists do their best to understand his or her problem and psychological attitude. The receptionist helps to decide which therapist the prospective client should see. The receptionist may also recommend that the therapist visit the client at home. We often receive calls from people who are worn out by pain, and have lost faith in medicine. Some of them simply cannot come to our centre without assistance.

Russian Express: And then you enter, and the therapist, or alternate health care professional says: "We will try to reduce or remove your pain."

Nathan Gendelman: Let's get our terminology straight first. Alternative health care is thousands of years old. Modern alternative health care in its present day form has existed for about 70 to 130 years, depending on which type of therapy you are talking about. So, what shall we call alternative health care? Who practises which therapy?

Physiotherapy, massage therapy, and osteopathy are practised by us as rehabilitation treatments for our patients. We are not opposed to mainstream medicine. We support the use of new medical practices and technologies, and the benefits they have brought. Mainstream medicine has rendered many services to humanity. For example, it has eradicated smallpox, and made many other terrible diseases history in many parts of the world.

By the way, our mandatory admission requirement for therapists to practice at our centre is 5 to 6 years of work experience in a hospital. That's where our therapists accumulate experience, and build an extensive professional foundation previous to specializing in a therapy.

The important thing about our method is that it is unhurried. Oriental doctors of the past had tea with their patients for some time before they started treatment. These doctors conversed with new clients on various subjects and tried to understand their patients natures and the causes of their conditions, that were often hidden somewhere in the past, and would emerge from their recollections.

We cannot afford the luxury of having our patients over for tea for a number of days, but we do allow 40 minutes for the first visit. Quite often a subsequent visit confirms the preliminary diagnosis that the therapist developed during that first visit.

Not long ago a woman came to me complaining of intense pain radiating down her arm. We talked. Gradually I guided her from her complaints to her memories, and at one point she told me that when she was 12 years old, she jumped from the second floor window in order to show off. She was surprised when I started to knead her feet gently, because she was expecting to have her neck vertebra re-aligned. She was even indignant, "What do you think you are doing tickling my heels!" After her pain went away, words could not express her gratitude, and she cried.

Sometimes a client may have a number of injuries of conditions that call for more than one therapeutic approach. In those cases two different therapies may be applied toward the client's recovery.

Russian Express: Nathan, speaking today's language, Health in Motion is a certain brand. How did the company start?

Nathan Gendelman: It started when at the age of 17 when I moved from Estonia to Leningrad, and enrolled in the College of Physical Culture and Sports. I went in for boxing and did quite well. I was put on the city team and made the National Team of the Russian Federation. I had my hair already cut for conscription into the Russian army when I received my diploma as a physical therapy instructor. I got a deferment from entering the army, but only until the day I received my diploma.

The next day I was on a train to Grozny in Chechnya. In 1984 it was peaceful there, but soon we were relocated to Afghanistan where the situation was more than a little hotter. Two years later I was badly injured, and my introduction to rehabilitation began at the Krasnodar Military Hospital. The doctors said that even if I were able to walk again, I would have to use a cane for the rest of my life.

My friend, a Dungan, got me out of the hospital, literally. The Dungans are the descendants of a Chinese family of great antiquity. Some of them settled in central Asia a long time ago. Dungan led me to a small village near Almaty, Kazakhstan, northeast of Afghanistan, not too far from the border with China. My friend's grandfather treated me for three months. The Dungans pass on their medical knowledge from generation to generation. Of course, three months were too short a

time to understand his manipulations and herbal recipes. The main thing is that I was able to go back home on my own two feet.

I enrolled in Leningrad at the Herzen Pedagogical University, in the Faculty of Remedial Gymnastics. Later I switched to the part-time program and set up a Health Co-operative together with my friends from my time in Afghanistan. The co-operative movement in Russia was just starting then. We organized local and international sports events for disabled athletes and helped them to establish themselves in sport and in everyday life.

At the same time I was learning a form of manual therapy. I travelled in the countryside in Russia and observed old people treating their patients. They had not heard their work described as therapy, but they were helping people to recover.

In 1989 I moved to Israel. Then I saw a notice about a physiotherapy program in Jerusalem, and found out that there were 400 applicants for 35 vacancies. The exam questions were translated into Russian in such a terrible way that anyone would have preferred them to be in the original Hebrew, honestly. I was greatly surprised to see my name on the list of those who were accepted. Eventually, I was one of 25 students to graduate from the program.

It came as a second surprise to me that the concepts of modern physiotherapy in Israel were much broader than the Russian idea of physiotherapy. Using electrical physiotherapy equipment is only a small part of a physiotherapist's skills, which also include manual therapy, massage, and special remedial exercises.

Seven years of work at clinics in Jerusalem gave me both experience practising, and recognition from my colleagues. This recognition is something that any professional can be proud of, because it may be much easier to win gratitude from one's patients than recognition from one's colleagues.

In Canada I had to start anew as a therapist. Much has been said about the difficulty of receiving recognition for foreign training and education qualifications in Canada. I faced the difficulties, and there is no point in talking about it again.

It happened that during all those years I was working toward my current specialty – osteopathy. My qualifications have now been recognized officially. After completing an in depth five year program, I have received a diploma in osteopathy from the Canadian College of Osteopathy.

Russian Express: The name of your profession, osteopathy, is familiar to many people, but a non-specialist would hardly be able to explain what you do and how osteopathy differs, say, from manual therapy.

Nathan Gendelman: In a few words, osteopathy is about the body's ability to heal itself. This was the approach taken by the American scientist Dr. Andrew Still, who was the founder of osteopathy. The primary role of the osteopath is to facilitate the body's inherent ability to heal itself, to "discover" the health in a person. In addition, osteopathy treats the body as a harmonious whole, not as a collection of separate parts.

The manual therapy practised in Russia is directed primarily to the spine, and the bones. This type of manual therapy sometimes means that the patient experiences pain to overcome pain. In contrast, osteopathic touch is precise and gentle. It is grounded in the principle that no pain should be experienced during therapy. Pain is a signal or a warning from the body. A colleague of mine once said that a painful massage is like driving a car with blaring security alarms.

The osteopath's hands are his only tools to identify the source of a disease and restore lost or impaired functions of the body. Of course, the practice of Osteopathy is only possible with an exhaustive knowledge of the human anatomy and an understanding of the interrelationship of all systems in the human body.

Ideally, people should come to us for the prevention of pain, and to maintain health. Like many therapists, we practice diagnostic techniques that allow us to identify and prevent emerging dysfunctions. Unfortunately, it is not the case that patients come to us before they have trouble. We deal mainly with advanced conditions.

Russian Express: Who are your patients?

Nathan Gendelman: We see people with various neurological conditions— Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, and the after effects of a stroke. Another group of patients has spine problems, and neck and back pain. We treat many children, especially those affected with cerebral palsy, or those suffering from hyperactivity, which creates so much trouble for parents.

I'd like to say again what I said at the beginning. The success of a treatment depends not only on the therapist's skill, but also on the patient's determination to get rid of the disease. If a patient co-operates with the therapist, success will come. If he watches the therapist's efforts passively, treatment often won't do any good. I am very straightforward with patients who are not active participants in their own healing. I sometimes say, "I think that you are wasting your money, and I am wasting my time." For example, how can anyone cure a stomach problem, if a patient goes to a fly by night hamburger joint after leaving his doctor's office? Treatment is not a monologue by the therapist, it's a dialogue between the therapist and the patient.

The family members of a patient often assist with the therapy. Rehabilitation, especially after a serious disease, is a long process that places a great strain on a patient's family. We educate family members about the importance of appropriate patient care, remedial exercises, and a good diet.

Athletes are a special client group. Compared to the average person, they are often exposed to more physical trauma, and their threshold for pain sometimes does not take into account the importance of the danger signal that pain provides.

Sports injuries are very common, and some athletes try to forget about them as soon as possible, but the body remembers everything. The negative information of an injury is stored by the body, and at a critical point or during stress it may return to overwhelm the athlete.

The danger is increased for young athletes attending, for instance, a sports school. A young athlete is unable to assess risks adequately. It is the duty of adults and, first of all, coaches to protect their athletes from injury. We have close connections with a number of schools, and we are grateful to those coaches who listen to our advice and who are not blinded by the promise of future successes.

Russian Express: Nathan, everybody knows that having to wait for months to be seen by a doctor who is a specialist is one of the major problems of Canadian health care system. Do you also have long waiting lists?

Nathan Gendelman: At Health in Motion patients are seen by appointment. We want to ensure that a patient is seen by the appropriate therapist and gets appropriate care as soon as possible. We understand human pain and we provide emergency care at the clinic at 5927 Bathurst Street in Toronto. We also make emergency house calls if the patient cannot travel to the clinic. The clinic's telephone number is 416-250-1904.