

A calm and dignified presence

by Karin Mont



Karin Mont, MARH,
ARH Chair

‘Discipline’ is not a word likely to trend across social media platforms – it carries too many negative connotations, ones which are usually associated with control, obedience, compliance, and the imposition of rules or regulations from a higher authority. Yet, there are also positive qualities which can be applied to the word, such as dedication, duty, service and self-restraint. Surely if one single person could be described as embodying the positive elements of discipline, it was our Queen. On her 21st birthday, while still Princess Elizabeth, she made the following pledge: ‘I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service, and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.’

This was a pledge to which Queen Elizabeth II adhered throughout her long reign. As a result, much of her life had to follow a meticulously timed schedule, to which her own needs were subordinated. Her Majesty’s return to royal duties, just four days after the death of her husband Prince Phillip, was but one example of her absolute dedication to public service. The fact that the Queen clearly loved the countryside, her horses, her dogs and, when off duty, preferred to dress simply, often sporting her trade-mark headscarf, helped to project an image of an ‘ordinary’ person, with whom we could readily identify.

Yet Her Majesty was anything but ordinary – as the Dean of Windsor observed at her funeral on 19 September 2022: ‘... her calm and dignified presence has given us courage to face the future ...’. She did not give media interviews, she kept her personal opinions to herself, she was an unflinching supporter of homeopathy, and she provided an exemplary example of responsible statesmanship. We have every reason to believe that King Charles III will endeavour to uphold the high standards of sovereignty which he has inherited from his mother, the Queen. However, he will face a different and very modern set of challenges.

We now operate in an environment where the qualities of integrity, self-discipline, restraint, responsible behaviour, and working for the greater good, are increasingly in short supply. Wherever you look, the emotional, highly subjective response, seems to dominate discussion in all areas of our lives, from the macro environment of global politics, through to our personal interactions with family and friends.

The mainstream media thrives on sensationalism, despite claims of ‘balanced’ reporting. Just observe how an average news item is introduced and how the interviews are set up; also listen carefully to the wording used – in most cases you will see a pattern emerge, one in which the viewer / listener is taken along a carefully planned route, and left to draw but one conclusion, which may, or may not, represent an accurate or unbiased conclusion.

The environment in which the opinion of a presenter, or media corporation, takes precedent over straight, objective reportage, carries negative consequences for all of us. It

leaves us wondering how do we know who or what to believe; how do we differentiate between fact or fiction – who can we trust? And this creates a very negative energy, which all too readily filters across the various social media platforms in a potentially harmful and destructive manner.

There are of course positive sides to social media – information can be readily shared between interested parties, and having the ability to communicate instantly with your family and friends can be invaluable. For example, during the lockdowns of the last couple of years, social media was a lifeline for some because it played a crucial role in reducing the negative impact of imposed isolation, by keeping people connected. However, for others, the never-ending and relentless propaganda campaigns launched from all sides of the political and social spectrum, simply fuelled confusion and exacerbated distress.

It seems that without the moderating presence of respect and restraint, even the most apparently innocuous social media post can rapidly descend into a sparring contest between the self-righteous and the opinionated. For those individuals who actually relish an abundance of confrontational opportunities, social media provides rich pickings. For more timorous individuals, or those lacking in self-confidence, a social media post that turns ugly can be utterly devastating.

The irony is that many of our interactions on social media involve complete strangers, who we’ve never met, and know little or nothing about – but we still take critical or hurtful comments personally, which means our reactions and responses are often unnecessarily defensive. That is counter-productive, and only serves to aggravate an already tense situation. After all, if an observation shared with others is true and informative, it remains true and informative, irrespective of the negative comments it might attract. There is absolutely no need to defend what is right in the first place.

We cannot prevent others from acting badly or inappropriately, but we can control our responses. Usually, the best approach is to avoid engaging in any response at all, or at least wait until matters have cooled off, which makes a measured response more likely – in fact if we always try to communicate with others in the manner we like others to communicate with us, we shouldn’t go far wrong. *Somehow, we need to find our very own ‘calm and dignified presence’* – something which radiates a positive energy, deflects any negativity created by others, and helps us to cope with whatever challenges lie ahead.

There are, without question, a lot of worrying things happening around us, driving up anxiety levels for many as we approach a winter in which our economy plummets, heating and food prices soar, and news outlets across the globe predict uncertainty and instability for many years to come. What can we do to make a difference?

We can start to prepare now. If we want to be there for our patients, ***we must first find a coping strategy of our own***, something which helps us to maintain the centre ground when the going gets rough.

Our mental and emotional wellbeing is key to us achieving that balance. We know that the mind exerts a powerful influence on our overall health, so our thought processes are really important. When we allow negative thoughts to proliferate, we increase our susceptibility to disease. Conversely, there have been numerous studies which show that individuals with a fundamentally optimistic outlook on life, generally enjoy better health than their pessimistic counterparts, and tend to live longer. For those with a natural tendency to assume a pessimistic view, cognitive therapy can be effective in reprogramming negative thought patterns.

It is important to try to find some way to optimise our mental and emotional wellbeing because we know that psychological factors affect the immune system directly – the study of this relationship is known as ‘psychoneuroimmunology’. One of the earliest accounts of a study involving psychoneuroimmunology took place in Japan in 1919, and was undertaken by a scientist called Ishigami, who was researching schoolchildren suffering from tuberculosis at the time. He observed that cases of active tuberculosis always increased when the children and their teacher were going through a period of intense ‘emotional excitement’. Although the immune measurement system used by Ishigami was very basic (he observed the ability of white blood cells to destroy foreign bacteria), it was clear that the upsurge in disease correlated to a measurable decline in immune function. Ishigami therefore concluded that emotional stress had resulted in a lower immune response, which in turn led to an increase in disease. Since that early study, a large and varied pool of information has been accumulated, and the conclusions remain constant – ***psychological and emotional factors influence the immune systems of both humans and animals, and this impacts directly upon physical health.***

As homeopaths, we are incredibly fortunate, because we already know and understand the importance of the relationship between our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, and we have a vast array of medicines from which to make a bespoke, individualised prescription. We know that a healthy body is constantly re-adjusting and re-calibrating to adapt to the changing environment in which it lives. We know that we are dependent upon, and inextricably linked to, the natural world around us. We know that the damage we do to our precious planet, ultimately damages us too. We know that if we want to build a meaningful life, we have to live (to the best of our ability) in harmony with nature, and when we try to override or undermine natural processes based on our still limited knowledge of science, we invariably compromise or inhibit natural healing.

We know that when things go wrong, and we get sick, we have to work with our body, to enable and optimise our innate powers of recuperation. We also know that we can enhance our ability to heal by making healthy lifestyle choices. However, we need to recognise that for many of our patients, this salutogenic approach to health takes them into new and slightly scary territory. If we want their journey to improved health to be successful, we have to be prepared to support them along the way, one small step at a time.

Remember, conventional medicine adopts the pathogenic approach to health. The message, which is remorselessly hammered into the public consciousness at every opportunity, is that health can only be maintained by going to war with disease. Invasive testing is invariably followed by aggressive interventions involving surgery, radiation or other toxic treatments; and pills of all shapes and sizes are routinely prescribed, often with very little obvious justification. In the UK we spent an eye-watering £9.5 billion on prescription drugs in the year ending June 2021. And then, of course, there are all those vaccines and the jabs – accurate costings for the COVID jabs seem elusive, which suggests a lot of money was spent on something that failed to prevent both infection and transmission and, as for the adverse reactions, well that is another matter, currently unfolding.

Apart from the obvious damage done by SARS-CoV-2 and lockdowns, we now have a situation where many people are hyper-anxious about their health and, as we know, anxiety reduces immunity and enhances susceptibility. As it is becoming increasingly difficult to get an appointment to see a doctor, a growing number of patients are researching their own symptoms, and looking for alternative approaches to their healthcare. These are patients who may well decide to ‘try’ homeopathy, and we know we can help them, so what can we do to ensure that their initial experience of homeopathy is positive?

A few suggestions: Ask the unprejudiced observer within you to oversee your ‘calm and dignified presence’; this means listening with an open mind, trying to understand the patient’s perspective, keeping interjections to a minimum, avoiding making comments which might be viewed as ‘judgemental’ and, even if asked, keeping your personal opinions to yourself. If you succeed in achieving all of the above, you will have gone a long way to gaining the patient’s confidence and trust, which should help to reduce the patient’s anxiety levels, and thereby initiate the healing process.

True, the world is in a bit of a mess at the moment, but the pendulum swings in both directions, and order grows out of chaos. It may take time, but we have homeopathy, and we have our committed and pro-active community to support us, so we will eventually come through this period of discontent, stronger, fitter and more resilient. If we can find a way to connect with our own ‘calm and dignified presence’, our journey will be much easier. □