

Clifton Springs Hospital

Historic Healing Waters and Modern Integrative Medicine

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Among hospitals in the United States, Clifton Springs Hospital and Clinic, in Clifton Springs, New York, is unique as a local facility that provides a wide range of alternative and complementary medicine (ACM) services blended together with conventional medicine. This facility is the only fully functioning and accredited U.S. hospital built on healing mineral springs and it has a long tradition in its use of hydrotherapy; homeopathy; and nutritional, physical, and botanical medicine.

There are few U.S. hospitals that have as many different integrative therapies and practitioners on site. Established in 1850 by Henry Foster, M.D. (1821–1900), a progressive, spiritually oriented physician, Clifton Springs Hospital and its comprehensive ACM wing—called The Springs of Clifton—have consistently used the best available technology, personnel, and treatment options.

A Natural Setting for Natural Medicine

The town of Clifton Springs is situated just north of New York State's Finger Lakes Region, about 25 miles south of Lake Ontario. The odor of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) can be detected in the air, and some locals refer to this odor as "the smell of health." Indeed, upstate New York has a rich history of natural medicine treatments. As Les Moore N.D., M.S.O.M., L.Ac., director of the Integrative Health Department at The Springs, noted:

In the course of my training I read *How to Treat the Sick without Medicine*,¹ written in the late 1800s by James Caleb Jackson (1811–1895). He talked about the healing springs in Dansville, New York, which is not far from here. I also knew about Saratoga Springs, because there were texts written about its mineral springs. Two leading authors of homeopathic texts, E.B. Nash, M.D. (1838–1917), and James Tyler Kent, M.D. (1849–1916) were from upstate New York. The father of scientific hydrotherapy, Simon Baruch, M.D. (1840–1921), was from New York, as was the "Father of Physical Culture," Bernarr Macfadden (1868–1955). So I knew that this area of upstate New York was incredibly rich in natural therapies.

Dr. Moore added that "the Seneca Indians were the first to use the healing waters in this part of upstate New York. When the settlers arrived, in the early 1800s, they constructed a simple

wooden trough under a shed. The curative powers of the springs attracted attention among the early residents of the state, and many came to bathe and to fill jugs of the healing water to take home. Back then, people also took an 'air cure.' This gave the people an opportunity of getting out of confined clothing and let fresh air and sunlight bathe their bodies."

Despite its rustic, rural setting and quaint turn-of-the-century buildings, Clifton Springs' approach to wellness more closely resembles European health care, with integrative medicine being well-established plus therapeutic mineral baths, fed by white sulfur springs on-site and a natural pharmacy to fill prescriptions.

Dr. Foster, the founder, was trained at Western Reserve College Medical School, Cleveland, Ohio. He continued his studies at New Grafenberg, in Herkimer County, New York, which was modeled after Grafenberg, Bavaria, where Vincent Preissnitz, an early pioneer in hydrotherapy, established a modern hydrotherapy unit. The design of Clifton Springs was based on Dr. Foster's vision of what a health facility should be like.

Dr. Moore observed:

The word "sanitarium" is often applied to our facility. Its Latin derivation implies a place where one's health is restored. When tuberculosis [TB] became an epidemic, the only institutions which could help the patients were the water-cure and nature-cure sanitariums. As a result, the term "sanitarium" came to be associated with TB.

In the early 1900s, Clifton Springs was the first hospital in the United States to have an "open floor" psychiatric ward. Here, the patients were treated like human beings. Previously, psychiatric patients were either kept behind locked doors or in chains. Because of Clifton Springs' reputation as a sanitarium, the term later became associated with mental health.

Clifton Springs Today

Consistent with Dr. Foster's original vision, the hospital provides patients with a safe, comfortable, place that engenders a feeling of tranquility. The lighting is soft and indirect and the colors, textures and artwork within the hallways and rooms have been composed mindfully. In addition the staff of The Springs participated in the design of the new wing and a group of artists met for months to determine the best ways to enhance the healing environment.

Early History of Clifton Springs Hospital

Pre-1800s—Senecas use the mineral baths for healing

1806—Settlers establish The Clifton Spa House Dispensary

1825—Sanitarium, which also used an “air cure,” added

1849—Settlement and springs officially named Clifton Springs

1850—Henry Foster, M.D., establishes a health care facility, based on Christian principles, the first hospital to offer pastoral and spiritual care on a full-time basis

1854—Establishment of The Clifton Springs Water Cure Company; Dr. Foster’s brother, William, assists to expand the facilities

1856–1871—New facilities added: Turkish and salt baths; a gymnasium; and a chapel

1871—Name changed to Clifton Springs Sanitarium Company; nicknamed “The San”

1881—Deed of Trust established

1882—Nurses; training school established

1891—Lehigh Valley Railroad establishes a station at Clifton Springs

1882—First open-ward psychiatric unit established

1896—5-story brick building, equipped with new medical equipment, electric lights and a solarium, built; helping Clifton Springs prosper

1897—Use of early x-ray equipment (the second in the United States)

1917—Occupational Therapy Association started at Clifton Springs Hospital



Henry Foster, M.D. (1821–1900), founder of Clifton Springs Hospital.



Les Moore N.D., M.S.O.M., L.Ac., Integrative Health Department, The Springs of Clifton, Clifton Springs Hospital, with one of the tubs used for balneotherapy. Photograph by Todd Jennings, The Country Studio, Shortsville, New York.



Dr. Moore treating a patient. Photograph by Todd Jennings, The Country Studio, Shortsville, New York.

“We treat the patient, not the disease. This approach is also the basis for homeopathy and naturopathy, as well as Oriental medicine.” In addition to treating patients, The Springs also holds classes in *qigong*, yoga, physical culture, and Healing Touch, and, according to Dr. Moore, “Clifton Springs Hospital has the first naturopathic residency in New York State, which has existed for 2 years now.”

The ACM staff at The Springs provides care to inpatients, outpatients, and nursing home patients. Dr. Moore consults with conventional physicians and oversees the ACM staff whose therapies include homeopathy, naturopathy, acupuncture, classical Chinese medicine, chiropractic, massage, Reiki, *t'ai chi*, Therapeutic Touch, hypnotherapy (including an M.D. hypnotherapist), Feldenkrais,[®] nutritional and spiritual counseling, esthetics, and other forms of treatment, including therapy using the mineral springs, which is discussed below.

Music therapy is also included. Dr. Moore said:

We also have a music therapist who plays the harp, Roxanne Ziegler. She plays the harp throughout the hospital, including in the [operating room] during an operation. There was a joke around here about that. When some surgical patients have come out of anesthesia, they’ve thought they had died and gone to heaven. But we know that music can be a powerful form of energy medicine, conducive to healing and wellness. We have music available in all of our treatment rooms, and the selections have been specifically matched to the treatments we provide.

Clifton Springs Hospital also employs a full-time director of spiritual care as well as a complement of spiritual care volunteers. The spiritual component is integral to the care at Clifton Springs Hospital. Founder, Dr. Foster, who firmly believed in the power of prayer, stated: “You might as well try to cure disease by prayer without treatment, as to cure it by treatment without prayer.” In fact, within the older sanitarium building is a large chapel, which features an enormous mosaic of The Last Supper and two large stained glass windows, all created by Tiffany in the 1890s. The chapel was built to be central—not adjacent—to the Sanitarium’s activities. In addition, there is another, smaller, chapel in the new wing.

Dr. Moore’s role in establishing the ACM wing and directing the integrative department was based on his background and training. He explained:

I am a naturopath, and was trained in classical Chinese medicine at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine (Portland, Oregon). I was drawn to naturopathy as a boy because my dad is an herbalist. He trained me and then I was trained by other herbalists; this led to naturopathic medical school, and from there to the study of classical Chinese medicine. . . .

Because of my background, I helped establish holistic clinics in Ithaca and Canandaigua, New York. I was then invited by Clifton Springs to help. . . .reestablish [an] integrative department. This meant creating an entire integrative medicine wing of an allopathic hospital! [The people involved] were extremely open to natural therapies as well as drawing on their rich history of the use of mineral springs and integrating their use into the hospital’s offerings. That was 4 years ago and it has been tremendous; we all work together.

When The Springs opened in 2000, the underlying philosophy was that healing is more than merely curing an ailment. Dr. Moore said:

Contents of 1 U.S. Gallon of Clifton Springs Mineral Water

Component	Grains
Calcium carbonate	9.68
Magnesium carbonate	13.12
Sodium sulfate	7.76
Calcium sulfate	69.20
Magnesium sulfate	14.48
Sodium chloride	9.28
Calcium chloride	4.08
Magnesium chloride	4.08
Organic matter	Trace
Total	133.68

NOTES: Both sulfurated hydrogen gas and carbonic acid gas are present in the water. Because of the high percentage of sodium chloride, the water is saline.

Finally, Clifton Springs Hospital has one of the world's most comprehensive natural pharmacies in a hospital, offering encapsulated and entabulated nutritional and herbal supplements, Chinese patent herbs, Chinese bulk herbs, Western bulk herbs, Chinese herbal granules, and Western herbal tinctures.

Balneology

One of the special features of Clifton Springs is balneology, the use of mineral baths for therapeutic purposes. This treatment has a substantial body of research supporting its use, going back to Hippocrates, one of its first advocates.²

According to Dr. Moore (who is also president of the American Society of Medical Hydrology and Spa Medicine), therapeutic baths have a long history in the United States, Europe, Israel, and Japan. The bathing process is beneficial to the individual because various minerals are absorbed transdermally through the skin. The delivery of the minerals works in a way that is similar to an estrogen or nicotine patch. Throughout the world, because each spring has its own unique mineral formula, individuals will go to the various spas accordingly. Therefore, each spa has its own health niche; one location might be focused on the treatment of hypertension and another on osteoarthritis, depending on the mineral composition of the water.

Regarding upstate New York, Dr. Moore said:

For more than 200 years the local mineral springs have provided therapeutic waters. By 1915 there were more than 100 natural mineral springs in New York—more than any other state. Interestingly, each mineral spring has a slightly different composition, so the water at Saratoga Springs is slightly different from the water here at Clifton Springs. One spring may have more magnesium, or lithium, or calcium, or sulfur. The waters here are similar to the springs found at The Greenbriar, in West Virginia. They are also white sulfur springs, and the health benefits are numerous.

There are several treatments involving water. Hydrotherapy, or hydrotherapy, covers everything involving water as a cure. Medical hydrology includes all forms of water healing, including drinking



The hospital includes a comprehensive natural pharmacy. Photographs by Todd Jennings, The Country Studio, Shortsville, New York.

balneology, or balneotherapy (therapeutic baths). And crenology, or creneotherapy, involves the general use of mineral water.

Fundamentally transforming, water is used for cleansing, for purifying, and for basic survival. Both external use of water (compresses, showers, wraps, bathing, swimming) and internal use of water (drinking and other internal cleansing procedures) are integral to the spa experience. Water therapies are homeostatic in nature; they depend upon the body's ability to maintain balance or stability in a changing environment. This process is thermodynamic in nature: By varying the temperature, the mechanical distribution and/or the chemical composition of water, many different treatments and effects can be achieved.³

Examples of indications for balneotherapy include:

- Chronic rheumatic diseases
- Circulatory diseases, especially mild-to-moderate hypertension and peripheral circulatory diseases
- Psychosomatic and stress-related disorders
- Addictions, including smoking
- Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes, obesity, and gout
- Gastrointestinal diseases
- Mild respiratory diseases
- Trauma sequelae
- Gynecologic diseases
- Skin diseases and disorders, such as psoriasis, dermatitis, fungal infections, and other skin injuries.



Six rooms for baths include five tubs with both mineral water and fresh water, through two sets of taps. The rooms also have tables for other alternative and complementary medicine treatments. Photographs by Todd Jennings, The Country Studio, Shortsville, New York.

Contact the Hospital

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Balneology may also be indicated for rehabilitating patients who have sequelae resulting from cerebrovascular disorders; chronic rheumatic diseases; injuries sustained in traffic accidents and sports; spinal and other forms of paralysis; and postsurgical conditions, particularly after knee surgery, cerebral surgery, and orthopedic surgery; and hip replacements.

Because Clifton Springs' mineral water has a high concentration of sulfur (see box entitled Contents of 1 U.S. Gallon of Clifton Springs Mineral Water), its springs are especially beneficial for treating liver, digestive, and urinary problems; chronic metallic poisoning; scrofula; venereal diseases, such as syphilis; gynecologic problems; skin diseases; respiratory-tract diseases; and rheumatism.

White sulfur springs are also indicated for preventive medicine because they help build up physical strength and general immunity and are helpful for preventing occupational diseases. Because of the high concentration of sodium chloride, Clifton Springs' water is saline. Saline waters are indicated for treating rheumatic disorders; arthritis; central nervous system and peripheral nerve diseases; post-traumatic, orthopedic, and postoperative disorders; and gynecologic diseases. The sulfur springs bath is strongly antibacterial; it stimulates the mucous membranes and promotes expectoration. The hydrogen sulfide odor opens nasal and respiratory passages.

Mineral Baths for Pain Control

Approximately 70 percent of medical office visits within the United States are for addressing chronic pain and Dr. Moore emphasized that, while balneology is a vital component of pain treatment, it is used as part of an integrative approach. He also noted balneology's additional benefits:

In the Joint Commission on Accreditation and Health Care Organizations, which accredits all hospitals, pain management is one of their areas of inquiry. We have not only met their standards, we have gone far beyond them. Clifton Springs Hospital not only has all of the conventional treatments for pain control, we have a broad component of ACMs to treat pain. These include acupuncture, hypnosis, chiropractic, massage, and hydrotherapy. Hydrotherapy is particularly effective, as each of us is composed of 85–90 percent water, so immersion in a mineral bath has a broad spectrum of health benefits, including pain control.

We will use these therapies in combination, such as series of treatments of acupuncture and a mineral bath. Our research has shown that the need for prescription analgesics was significantly reduced after a series of mineral bath treatments. The optimum number of "soaks" for pain control is approximately 3 per week for a 3-week period. The positive effects can remain for as long as a year.

Reduction in blood pressure has been measured to remain lower up to 7 months later.

Additionally, balneology increases blood circulation and cell oxygenation; it also help to dissolve and eliminate toxins from the body by increasing metabolism and stimulating the liver.

We have also found that the mineral baths are extremely helpful for relieving low-back pain. Balneotherapy is very effective for treating fibromyalgia, and has been shown to reduce the number of "tender points."

Today, the hospital has six dedicated rooms for baths. Five of the tubs have mineral water, as well as fresh water, available through two sets of taps. The sixth tub has Jacuzzi-type jets and uses only fresh water. These rooms also have tables for massages, acupuncture, and other ACM treatments. There are also streams running beside the hospital and, by looking down from a small bridge, one can see the sulfur deposits on the stones.

Integrative Medicine

Of course, the integrative approach extends to treating a wide range of other ailments and problems besides pain control. Dr. Moore described what would happen to a hypothetical patient who would ordinarily fall under the rubric of conventional care:

A patient comes to have his gallbladder taken out. On the way here, he may drive past many hospitals, but he comes to Clifton Springs, because he can have acupuncture before the surgery, and then afterwards, to help him through the process. Our mineral baths also provide excellent postoperative therapy for surgical patients. There is a good deal of research on mineral baths used in rehabilitation and for postsurgical procedures. Although this is not particularly prevalent in the United States today, there is substantial research compiled in Europe, Japan, and Israel, going back 4 centuries. European spas, such as Baden-Baden [Germany], are world-famous; Israel's Dead Sea is a healing center; and baths are central to the Japanese lifestyle.

While the allopathic section of Clifton Springs Hospital offers the full spectrum of conventional medical care—surgery, cardiology, oncology, gastroenterology, et cetera—physicians will often ask for ACM consultations for their patients (for example, to see if acupuncture is indicated for treatment). Many of the staff physicians at Clifton Springs come to the AM wing for their own health maintenance. “They know the value of the mineral baths, of massage, of chiropractic,” states Dr. Moore, “and they share their views with their patients. People with acute medical conditions will always be cared for, such as victims of stroke or heart attack. But with the added components of integrative medicine, then we move beyond mere functionality toward optimum health.”

Dr. Moore observed that the consultation may also go in the opposite direction, with ACM practitioners recommending allopathic treatment.

Some patients have a deep distrust of doctors and hospitals, but they will see an ACM practitioner. But if we find, for example, a tumor in the abdomen or some other condition that needs allopathic treatment, we will recommend a consultation with a [conventional] physician. It's a “backdoor” entrance into the hospital. Focus studies have convinced us that patients want the best of both

worlds—conventional medicine and ACM—to be equally accessible in one location.

We have found many benefits to having alternative and complementary practitioners on staff within the hospital. First, the practitioner can build a practice within the hospital. This facilitates education both ways: The ACM practitioner can learn about conventional therapies as well as any new developments or procedures. This is important; and I believe that this is the way medicine will be practiced in the future. I am committed to seeing this happen. □

References

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