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Complementary & Alternative Medicine in Breastfeeding Therapy

Nikki Lee, RN, CST, IBCLC

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In a world replete with advanced technology, the skills of lactation consultants or *therapists*, as the author prefers, are often challenged by the physical and emotional fallout of modern birthing practices and inadequate support systems for new mothers. Nikki Lee is a pioneer in the field of lactation with 35 years of acquired wisdom, keen insights and unique clinical skills based on healing “soft techniques.”

Before providing details about specific complementary and alternative methods (CAMs), Ms. Lee carefully outlines the five types of CAM and explains the history and politics of CAM in the western world. Her book covers her experience of practices from four of these categories: manipulative/body-based, mind-body-based, whole medical systems and energetic medicines. Not covered are biologically based practices such as herbs and dietary manipulation.

Ms. Lee’s choice of the term *lactation therapist* is not accidental as she works from a paradigm of bringing healing to mothers and babies through whatever modality seems most suited. The reader is coached in how to create a healing environment that will optimize the mother and baby’s ability to joyfully connect and rehabilitate breastfeeding. In an increasingly medicalized world, her impassioned plea for holistic care of the mother-baby dyad is a reminder that skilled helping is much more than book knowledge, high-tech aides and quantifiable research.

Much of Ms. Lee’s work centers on the healing power of touch. Skin-to-skin care, massage for mother and baby, acupuncture, chiropractics, craniosacral therapy and remedial co-bathing are all discussed under the banner of touch, with homeopathy as the sole non-touch CAM. The philosophy, rationale, and available evidence for each modality are provided. The author is upfront about the fact that much available evidence falls low on the totem pole for CAM therapies, explaining the shortcomings of western research in analyzing CAMs that are individual-oriented. Compelling cases are shared from her personal experience of each modality.

It is a sad commentary of our world today that skin-to-skin would be included in a book on complementary therapies, highlighting that this biologically normal human behavior is no longer common to the point of being relegated to the “exotic” world of “optional” alternative therapies. This book needed to be written and is an important addition to mother-care literature.

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