

# From client to career

## How MLD changed my life

by Deborah Berry

While slightly depressed in the late 1980's I sought help from the complementary medicine world. Never having been "ill" as an adult I'd never questioned allopathic v complementary – now I found myself doing so. I went to the local Therapy Centre, picked up loads of leaflets and took them to a quiet place to read. I chose therapeutic massage and homeopathy (or did they choose me?) anyway I benefited enormously and decided to do massage therapy training at some time – just for family & friends and to learn more.

Life got in the way and it was about 8 years later that I researched courses and chose the Therapeutic Massage course run through the Maitri Foundation, Gloucestershire by Sheila Kean and Martin Taylor. Their training was fantastic – I enjoyed its content and format, the venue, professionalism and support. My earlier objective of "just for family and friends" shifted during my training and I established my business immediately after qualifying in 1998. It was a very part-time business as I also held a full-time job in the public sector. My plan now was to gradually reduce those hours and increase the time spent doing massage. But I felt I needed more bodywork knowledge and attended a variety of postgraduate trainings.

Somehow I became aware of Manual Lymph Drainage (MLD) and thought I'd just go along to a Basic course (40 hours) in the Dr Vodder method taught by one of the scarce British based teachers who had trained and qualified through the Dr Vodderschule, Austria. Well – half way through I knew this therapy was for me. This was when the subtle but powerful effects of this gentle "hands on" application embraced me. So I decided to continue with the remaining 120 hours – which took me to Austria. There Professor Hildegard Wittlinger – who had been taught by and worked with the creators of this wonderful therapy Dr & Frau Vodder – taught me.



In July of 2000, after the most intense two weeks of my life, I returned from the Wittlinger Therapiezentrum, the home of the Dr Vodder method of MLD, very proudly clutching my certificate of qualification. Joining the professional association MLDuk and updating my insurance were my first actions.

Well – now what? I'd made a considerable investment in myself, had this magical treatment method in my brain and hands but was working full time doing something that was no longer right for me. I agonised with the risks of quitting my employment with its security and pension, with the impact a change of this magnitude would inevitably have on my family and our finances and with the unknown. It took months but one day I took the decision – and quit.

In January 2001 I was no longer a local government officer but a bodyworker specialising in MLD. I had some lucky breaks – was accepted to work 1 day/ week in a hospice sector lymphoedema clinic (which I did for 3 years) and with the Arm and A Leg team (at that time providers of residential independent lymphoedema treatment). I worked hard too at making contact with local oncologists, vascular consultants and general and breast surgeons and have provided contracted out services to the NHS. I've been made welcome in the theatres of local and London based surgeons. As well as working with lymphoedema and related conditions across independent, NHS and hospice sectors I work with many of the non-lymphoedema conditions that benefit from MLD. I won't list these here – suffice to say MLD has 3 proven benefits: decongestive, relaxing (due to its effects on the nervous system and also on smooth muscle) and pain relieving.

# massagereport

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You can work out how it can be applied to many conditions you are faced with in your own clinics.

In 2003 my application to Professor Wittlinger to train as a Basic level teacher was approved. In 2005, after studying the medical theory, assistant teaching in many classes and passing the exams, I qualified and have been teaching since. In early 2007 I received approval to train as a Therapy 1 level teacher and after more studies and assistant teaching, in the UK, Ireland and Canada and passing the exams I qualified in 2008. Now I teach and qualify students to the stage at which they can integrate MLD (for people with an intact and functioning lymphatic system) into their existing practice.

Such is the repute and international standing of the Dr Vodder method of MLD that people travel great distances to undertake their training. At my venues in Ludlow and Stroud people have travelled from Denmark, Japan, Czech Republic, France and Australia and people from the UK have gone to work with MLD in other parts of the world. Some of these people are, like me, from a massage background and others have a medical qualification; midwives, nurses, physiotherapists, vascular and burn specialists, osteopaths and chiropractors. The common theme is the desire to learn the Dr Vodder method of MLD.

The decision to quit the known and take a chance was very difficult but once taken a natural order began to return. I now spend the majority of my time doing various aspects of what I love – practicing my therapies, supporting people through the not so serious to the downright awful, giving talks and demonstrations, teaching potential MLD therapists and providing ongoing therapist's support through the MLDuk helpline. So from quite a despairing situation between late 1999 and the beginning of 2001, in which I felt the world I'd created was falling apart, here I am having a ball. I know why I waited so long to take this chance and make this change – fear. How immobilising that was.

Sheila Kean and Maitri have been pivotal - Sheila is the massage therapist I turned to at the start of all this, was my teacher in 1997/8, the host for my first MLD tutor and now...I returned to Maitri this year as teacher of therapists starting out on their own exploration of Dr Vodder's MLD.

I find introducing people new to this technique incredibly exciting and am also excited by the subsequent enthusiasm many of them feel as MLD embraces them too. Here are quotes from people who successfully completed Basic and Therapy 1 with me during 2009 and have integrated MLD into their practises:

***"I have found that MLD has been very useful to add to my skills in the treatment of some clients, especially frozen shoulders, etc. to help promote a faster healing journey."*** Susanna Priest – EMS Pain Relief, Nailsworth

***"I had looked at the Vodder MLD training several times and had been put off the partly because of cost, partly because of the five day intensive course and partly***

***because of taking written exams after many years without pressure. Now having completed Basic & Therapy 1 I think the training system works and can see the need for attention to detail. I am having some very good results using the Vodder technique."*** Kathy Mills – Warrington.

***"Training in MLD has been a very positive step in my career. Gaining further knowledge and learning new skills has given me more confidence as a therapist and put newfound enthusiasm into my practice. Returning to learning was daunting to begin with but I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and the challenges that it brought."*** Becky Noblet – Stroud.

***"My initial interest in MLD began a couple of years ago when I began to see clients with lymphoedema through my work as a complementary therapist with a local hospice. Whilst the therapies I practiced could bring some emotional and spiritual relief I could not help with the physical problems of swelling, fluid seepage and pain. Undertaking this course has been a real challenge and is undoubtedly one of the most intensive learning schedules I have undertaken but it has been immensely rewarding. I still find it incredible that such a gentle and soothing skin technique can have such profound and normalizing effects on the body. I am very excited to be learning about MLD now, when it is clear that there is a growing awareness about the lymphatic system, its diseases and its importance on the long-term health of the entire body. My training to date has been under the tutorage of Deb and it is without doubt her dedication and passion for MLD and her ongoing training and support that has inspired me to continue on this fascinating journey."*** Janette Knight – Bridport

So if you're cautious about investing in yourself, afraid of change or worried if business is quiet at the moment this may be just the right time to learn something new. And, once qualified, you'll have that wonderful tool - Dr Vodder's MLD - and able to offer a different approach to different problems and hopefully expand your business too.

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