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Benson is home to alternative addiction treatment

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By *Bruce Edwards Herald Staff*

BENSON — Her voice is calm and reassuring. Just what you'd expect from someone who has spent nearly 20 years helping people conquer addictions like alcoholism, smoking and overeating.

But Rhonda Lenair is neither a doctor nor therapist. She's not even a certified alcohol counselor. Nor does she rely on the traditional 12-step programs to treat her patients.

Lenair bills herself as a unique energy healer and medical intuitive, someone who has treated more than 30,000 clients for a variety of addictions and disorders since she began her practice in 1987.

Recently, she and R. Barry Chalfin, her husband and program director of The Lenair Healing Center, relocated from Newbury, Mass., to a large house situated on 100 acres on Park Hill Road in Benson.



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Rhonda Lenair

Lenair, 49, describes her technique as a nonmedical, noninvasive approach, that employs her own internal energy that transforms a patient's bioelectrical system back to the point it was prior to the addiction. The treatment, according to Lenair, addresses both the physical and psychological aspects of the addiction or problem behavior.

Lenair sees her clients in a spacious ground floor office complete with gas fireplace and furnished with a large white sofa and chairs. Soothing music plays in the background.

Lenair herself is as calm as the room she works in. A slim woman with dark skin and exotic features, the one-time fledgling ballerina with the Boston Ballet sits ramrod straight and speaks in somewhat abstract terms.

"The process allows someone to be brought back to themselves, to their intrinsic state that they're born with," she says "We all, as human beings, forget we get lost on one road or the other, call it addiction or whatever — the name of the problem is irrelevant."

As a medical intuitive, the Brookline, Mass., native has no need to know about the patient's medical history or problem. The client lies down on a couch and is asked "to think about their problem."

"If alcohol is their problem I asked them to bring into mind the times that they'd be purchasing, preparing, ordering it ... then kind of bring it to an apex, if you will or crescendo, to the point as far as really procuring the desire in a way that they could, to the best of their abilities, salivate for it," she says.

"They feel my touch as a catalyst for me to be able to kind of walk in their shoes rather than observe them walking in their own shoes."

Lenair became aware of her ability while she was performing in London at the age of 16. She was hospitalized with a large growth that eventually disappeared. When leaving the hospital, she met a doctor versed in energetic healing who determined she had a strong electromagnetic field.

Intrigued by that revelation, Lenair spent the following years studying the field and refining what became her proprietary modality, known as The Lenair Technique (www.lenair.com).

At \$1,865 for three private sessions, Lenair's treatment program isn't cheap and it's not covered by insurance. But Lenair and Chalfin point out that the cost is less than what it would be for someone to enter an alcohol treatment center.

The first session lasts 90 minutes. The two follow-up sessions are 30 minutes each.

Follow-up sessions for the same problem within six months are \$185. Telephone consultations are \$395 for the initial session and \$135 for 15-minute follow-up sessions.

While they point out their clients come from all walks of life, the information kit emphasizes that those clients also include "royalty, Hollywood celebrities, rock stars and corporate executives."

One well-known client was a member of the late King Hussein of Jordan's family who suffered from a smoking addiction.

Lenair has received national media exposure in Elle magazine, The Boston Globe, Good Housekeeping and The Discovery Channel, among others.

Lenair has a legion of supporters who swear by her treatment. Many of their testimonials are included in a glossy 45-page brochure. Among them is Dan, a recovering alcoholic from the Worcester, Mass. area, who sought treatment from Lenair and hasn't had a drink since.

"I've had no compulsions, no consumption of alcohol for five years now," Dan said during a phone interview.

He said while he knew people who had "tremendous success" with Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12-step program wasn't for him.

Trying to stop drinking on his own didn't work, either.

"I did try to stop drinking on my own ... but always fell back into old patterns," he said.

Although at first skeptical of Lenair's treatment, the 45-year-old electrician said he was desperate enough at that point to try almost anything.

Middlebury astrologer Kathleen Johnson is sold on Lenair as well

"Whatever it was, she knows how to switch that switch off," said Johnson, a compulsive overeater, who went to see Lenair for the first time last month.

Since her first visit, Johnson said her craving for food has disappeared.

Johnson, who said she has tried every diet in the world, said Lenair impressed her as a very loving person.

"I think people who will thrive with her work will go to her," she said. "There's not just one path but this is the path that works for me."

While clients praise Lenair's method, it's a method that is not well known by those in the mainstream addiction treatment field.

Peter Lee chief of treatment services with the state Department of Health, division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention, said he's not familiar with Lenair's method of treatment, except that it's not traditional medicine.

"I just don't know of her technique," Lee said. "If it works for somebody, that's great."

Ames Sweet of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Addiction in New York also observed it's "not one of the more well known modalities for alcohol and drug addiction treatment."

But Sweet, a recovering alcoholic, cautioned that a quick-fix solution like the one offered by Lenair is not likely to work for most addicts, who need to have the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of their disease treated on an ongoing basis.

"If what she's doing works, God bless her," he said. "I'd just suggest ongoing attention needs to be paid because alcoholism has a way of coming back."

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