

Online to help out with health problems

As more people look for alternative solutions to their health problems, Women's Editor **CHRISTEN PEARS** meets The Northern Echo's new online health consultant

RUMANA Ramzan holds down two careers but still fizzes with energy. She's vital, confident and relaxed. In fact, she's a walking advertisement for alternative health care.

Rumana, who juggles her career as a natural health consultant with her role as general manager of The Darlington Partnership, has been an alternative therapist for ten years and specialises in a number of therapies, including kinesiology, reiki and flower remedies. She also offers nutritional and herbal advice, as well as health coaching and support.

"Complementary care is much more sustained than traditional medicine but the benefits can be enormous," she says. "When someone comes to you, you have to work with the whole person, not just their physical symptoms. You have to help them find themselves psychologically and look at their whole lifestyle, and you have to use all the tools available to help them get well."

Thirty-two year old Helen Walters (not her real name) has been Rumana's patient for 18 months. At the time of her first consultation, she had been suffering from anorexia for about 15 years, had a number of secondary illnesses and didn't feel she was benefiting from the treatment she was receiving from the NHS.

"It was getting to the stage where I knew I couldn't go on living the way I

RUMANA is sharing her expertise with Northern Echo readers. Read her article about food and health at www.thisisthenortheast.co.uk/healthspectrum/alternatives. For more information or to book a free ten-minute phone consultation, telephone (01325) 722803.

ALTERNATIVES

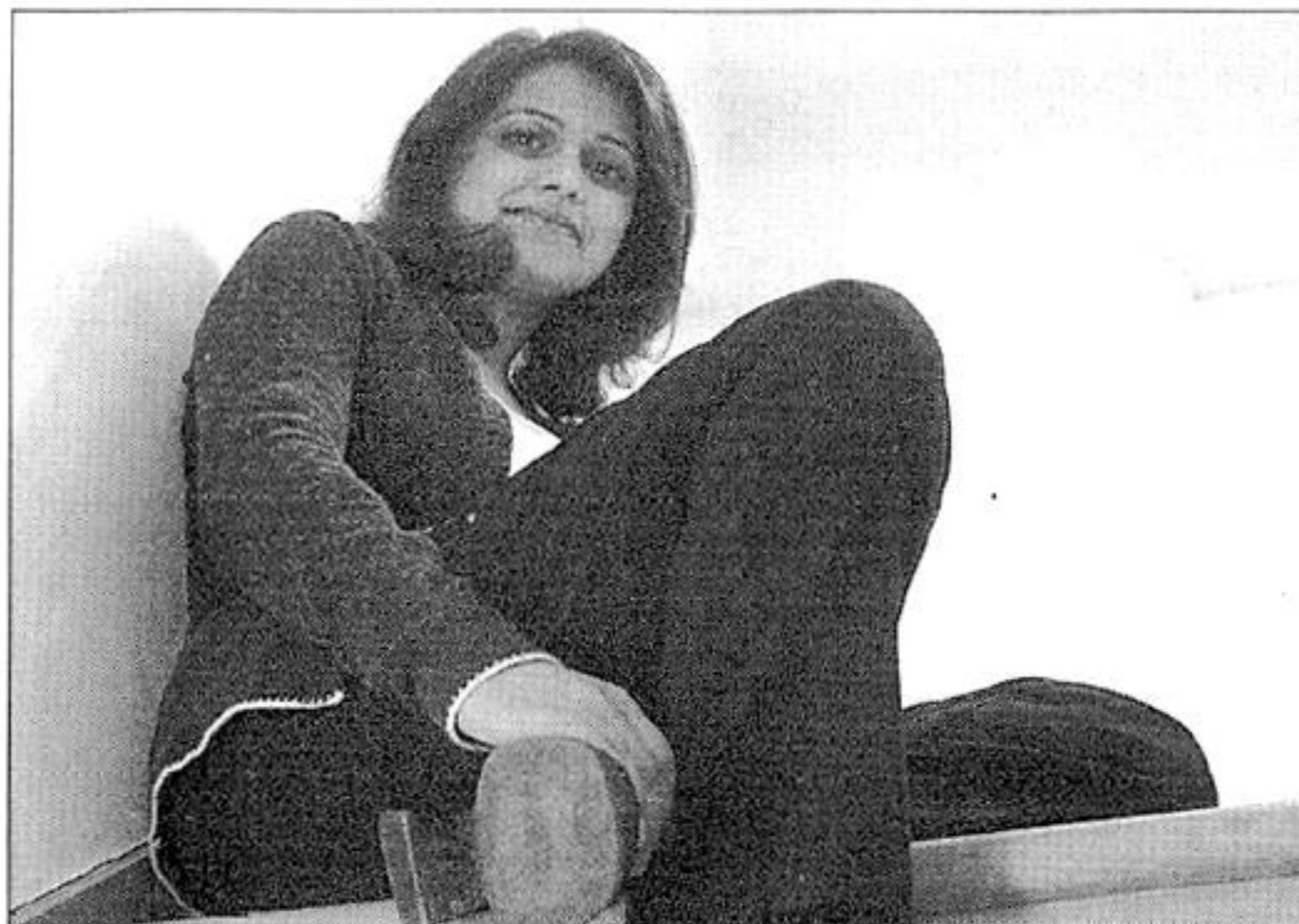
was and decided to go and see Rumana after reading an article about her. Initially, I had bio energy treatment and I got a lot of relief from my aches and pains. But she also offered counselling and I was really able to talk to her."

"I am certainly more positive; I can't even begin to explain how much better I am. My life doesn't revolve around the eating disorder any more and I've even gone back to university."

Like Helen, many of Rumana's patients come to her after reaching the end of the road with the NHS. But she doesn't believe the two are mutually exclusive. In fact, she would like to see greater integration between traditional medicine and natural health care.

"People think complementary therapies can't fit in with conventional medicine and that is one of the things I am working hard to change. People go the NHS as their first port of call so it's important that they are given all the information they need to make the right decisions for their health and well-being. But, the health service is very much led by the drug industry and there is hardly any choice. Where people should be getting information about the alternatives, there's a void."

She points out that around 25 per cent of GPs are qualified in at least one complementary therapy but are not able to practise within the health service. "They have the skills, but because the system is so inflexible they're not able to use them. This has to change," she says.



Health advice: The Northern Echo's new online health consultant Rumana Ramzan

Ultimately, Rumana would like to see a complete overhaul of the way the health service works and she wants more people to take an active interest in their own health.

"My own view of the health care system is very different from what exists now. I would like to see more people taking more control of their own health and well-being. They should be able to go to a centre where they learn about the importance of nutrition and exercise and only go to see their doctor when they really need to.

"It should be a lifelong process, not just a one-off session with a practitioner. The emphasis is on self responsibility, taking part in your own treatment and being dedicated to it," she says.

Rumana firmly believes that everyone can benefit from natural healing in some form, even if it's just by choosing organic food or introducing more herbs and spices to their diet.

"I was brought up in a family where natural health care was an integral part of our culture. When I used to have tension, my mum would massage my

head, and when I had an exam coming up, she would give me a natural energy drink.

"I want to educate people, teach them how to bring some of these things into their homes. Take baby massage, for example, it's so gentle but such an effective treatment, and any parent can do it for their child."

This month she is launching a clinic at Tall Trees in Yarm, which will be open to everyone and will offer a range of complementary therapies, including health and life coaching.

She can barely contain her enthusiasm as she talks about her ideas but she knows it's going to be a long time before real change takes place. She laments the fact that the West is lagging so far behind countries like India and China, where natural healing has been part of their culture for thousands of years.

"It's going to be years before we get to that stage," she sighs, "but there are some changes taking place. Boots has started to offer alternative therapies and Tesco has just bought a vitamin and nutrition company. People are a lot more aware of complementary medicine and it's something that's just going to grow and grow."

WIN A NATURAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

Rumana is also offering one reader a free natural health consultation at her Darlington clinic. For a chance to win, send your name, address and daytime telephone number to Natural Health Competition, Features, The Northern Echo, Priestgate, Darlington, DL1 1NF. The closing date is April 30.