

The Sex & Medicine Summit

Healthy Sexuality and the Medicine of the Future

Anita Teresa Boeninger launches the conversation with twenty global experts

Senshēant Magazine:

Tell us about the purpose of this Summit?

Anita Teresa Boeninger: Having worked in clinical and hospital settings for many years, I noticed there are two words you can never say: love and sex. You can't say, "I love my patients" or "I love my clients" because it's considered transference and unprofessional. *The idea in modern medicine is that if you're not trained in a particular arena – specifically sexual & mental health – you should never bring it up in a conversation.*

In my opinion, not having conversations about love and sex is missing the whole foundation of our health. Cutting out love and sex from the array of diagnostic and curative tools – essentially over-medicalizing the healing process – is cutting out highly beneficial approaches to health & healing. Accessing our innate ability to heal and maintain a state of wellbeing is the practical application of self-love at the most basic level. And of the best-

kept secrets of our time is that sexual energy can be deliberately harnessed for vibrancy and longevity, with research showing that good sex has incredibly therapeutic benefits. So the goal of this summit is to highlight the gap in the conversation around sexuality and health, with the idea being that sexuality is a major component of health that shouldn't be left out of the national (or global) health discussion. My hope for summit is that it will empower helping professionals of all backgrounds with more vocabulary, context, and confidence to address sexuality with their patients and clients.

Ultimately, I want to augment the discussion on health, healing and wellness, and give people more tools to allow this culture to advance and grow up in relation to sex & sexuality. I want health professionals to have access to available resources and the plethora of useful perspectives that are out there. I want sexuality and sexual wellbeing to be the center of discussion – ad-

ressing it as a major part of who we are as human beings.

SM: *Do you find that it's about not enough education or the shame surrounding sexuality that leads to the lack of conversation in the medical fields? Or is it a combination of both?*

ATB: Both. I believe it's shame and judgment on all sides. And the solution is not to bash doctors or to bash the institutions which are educating the doctors; rather just bring this conversation into more conference rooms, schools and forums on health. This will give people permission to be fully human both as a practitioner and patient or client.

In the same way that medical doctors are given very minimal training in nutrition (even though it's a huge component of health), most gynecologists have very little training, if any at all, around the topic of sexuality itself – human sexuality and sexual wellbeing. If the practitioners are, by default, ashamed of their own sexuality or

of discussing it, then how is the patient supposed to feel?

We have to start somewhere and begin with de-stigmatizing sexuality itself, give people and practitioners resources so they can discuss alternative reasons why one's equilibrium is off or hormones are imbalanced, or when they discover they have an autoimmune disorder. While research shows that sex can help boost the immune system, prevent heart disease, increase "feel-good" hormones, and many other benefits, I highly suspect that the opposite may be true: traumatic sex or sexual repression can actually lead to auto-immune problems. (<http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/sex-and-health?page=2>)

Furthermore, practices from Taoism that work directly on the endocrine system, systems like QiGong, can literally change how a woman goes through menopause or how a man could address prostate health or sexual dysfunction. Practitioners can be given access and knowledge on methods that have been used for hundreds of years and are very simple, in turn providing more options for patients. What would our world look like if doctors were more open to all these methods, and given access to a more integrative system? It's really exciting to think about it all being possible.



Integrative Health & Sexuality Educator Anita Teresa Boeninger, hosting a recent panel.

SM: *The question is: Can a doctor become vulnerable enough to say "I don't have an answer for you," "There's an unspoken component to this I suspect is important to get to," or "I don't know enough about this, let me refer you to So-and-So." ?*

ATB: We're still in the grip of this reductive, materialist model that is simply outdated. We're stuck in a model that treats the body as a bunch of parts and not a synergistic whole. A lot of times people hear the word sexuality and immediately think of sexual orientation or gender identity, but it's so

much bigger than that. Sexuality is the essence of who we are as biological beings; we reproduce, we have this biological directive... and all that springs from that—the emotional, psychological, spiritual level and human interpersonal relationships, and intimacy in all of these other arenas...

This summit is about opening up, having the courage to bring up sexuality, alternative health and ancient & contemporary medicinal practices, and be comfortable with these conversations. It's going to give people permission to speak about sexuality in a broader, more human manner. The closer we get to an integrative model the better, and that *HAS* to include sexuality. It can't be left out of the discussion anymore.

SM: *So, tell us about your Power-People you are talking to for the summit. How many physicians on the panel? What will they be discussing?*

ATB: I'll be interviewing up to twenty experts. Not just physicians, but a wide range of people including medical doctors, psychiatrists, occupational & physical therapists, psychologists, midwives, tantric experts, Taoist practitioners, intimacy coaches and so on. People from different perspectives to talk about sexuality and health in an intelligent way to try and shed light on where there is a gap in the education of not

just helping professionals but the population as a whole.

The adult sex education we get while growing up and in school is limited, unless it happens to be your primary focus in college or grad school. Most people just fumble through that part of their lives, and it's no less true for helping professionals. Most of the world isn't aware that there are practices specifically designed to cultivate sexual energy as a fundamental building block of extraordinary health. The implications are huge. This knowledge, just like when yoga first became popular, could give people so much relief from chronic fatigue issues, autoimmune diseases and other imbalances. It's crazy that *Love* and *Sex* – two of the most powerful medicines for healing the human body, mind, and soul – are considered taboo to bring up in the health conversation.

There are a few people leading the way and trying to create a different culture. Dr. Christiane Northrup is a real voice for women's health. I also really admire the work of Dr. Rachel Remen. She wrote a book called, "Kitchen Table Wisdom". She writes about her battle with Crohn's Disease, her numerous surgeries, and intense physical suffering. She eventually realized that she pushed her body so hard during and after medical school with this

really self punishing schedule, yet after a while she just got used to it and thought that it was normal. This has become normalized in the culture of the medical world, but there is a cost.

The question that I have for the doctors we interview is, "What do you think the costs are for *ALL* of us, when doctors are not allowed to be human?" And by that I mean they are not allowed to be soulful or delve into all of the dimensions of what it takes to be healthy and have wellbeing. The Summit is for those practitioners who really care about their patients, and to also empower the general public to know what's out there. It's for people who genuinely want to help others and who might struggle when they can see that someone really needs to talk about something that happened to them (such as sexual trauma), as opposed to just taking the prescription. The healthcare professionals I want to reach want to know more about specific kinds of therapy and in what situations they may be appropriate. They may learn about some of the incredible new therapies, from pelvic floor & perineum massage, to self breast massage for women to prevent breast cancer, or to get information on post-natal pelvic care. For example, in France, it's normal for most women to receive pelvic physical therapy after giving birth.

People are just seeking permission, that's all. They just need permission. When I used to work at NYU, people were terrified before surgery and I would work with them... I would say, "Give yourself permission to relax". For one hour, take time to breathe. What a difference that can make in someone's life! If everyone in the medical and helping professions can learn to do that and be allowed to do that, we would have a different world.

SM: *Is anyone else out there, doing what you're doing with this summit?*

ATB: Not that I know of... the doctors and nurses I have spoken to who are coming on board as experts are thrilled! They tell me no one is doing this, this is awesome and they thank me for bringing the conversation to the table. They are really excited and on board fully.

SM: *Can you tell us what inspired you to really take this on and do this? Tell us about how this evolved for you.*

ATB: I think it came organically because the first iteration of my practice/business was SOMA Wellness Arts. I was working in tandem with a neurologist, seeing her patients, and practicing out of her office. She is a headache specialist in private practice. After moving out of that office in June of this year, I realized that it was the

Stay tuned! At Senshēant press time, *The Sex & Medicine Summit: Healthy Sexuality & the Medicine of the Future* live premiere panel event happens Wednesday, January 21, 2015, in NYC, and the virtual event broadcasts in March. Refer to www.embodiedfemme.com for updates, and subscribe to the newsletter for how to attend.

perfect bridge to transition me into what I am really passionate about, which is the integration of sexuality and sexual health in therapeutic practice. I believe in providing education & practices that specifically target sexual energy as the “fueling principle” of every other system in the body. And I wanted to do it on my terms, as opposed to just trying to fit (awkwardly) into a pre-existing mold.

I used to worry about being legitimized by the medical world – thinking that the institutions of academia and other conventions are the final authority, and that if I don’t get their approval, then I am not going to succeed, or I have nothing valuable to contribute, or no one will listen to me. I don’t believe that anymore – **I actually think I am providing them with an opportunity to innovate, expand, and mature as a profession and culture that is currently out of balance.**

The Embodied Femme (www.embodiedfemme.com) is the vehicle for my work now and is more congruent with my message and who I am, and it’s all of these expressions that come through, which

couldn’t come through before. I was operating inside the current medical and clinical model before, playing “nice,” but now I am ready to move on to something much bigger. Something I really believe in.

I am a part of a movement – the embodiment movement – which is a hallmark of what I call the New Feminine Paradigm. This is really about bringing forth a more feminine culture, and following the impulse towards integration, as opposed to creating more hierarchy based on outdated reductive philosophies. Organizing our perceptions of reality through the filter of integration is done by asking—“how does everything connect?” It’s a paradigm where no aspect of being human is deliberately left out, there are no parts that are left behind; in other words—it’s about embracing our wholeness.

I am lending my voice to this movement in my own way, bringing my own perspective to it, and being a voice to say, “Let’s validate our sexuality, let’s honor and celebrate it; why is there so much stigma around who we are at the

soul and primal level! Let’s really *grow up* as a culture and embrace a deeper wisdom here.” ■



Paul B. Goode

Anita Teresa Boeninger is an Integrative Health & Sexuality Educator, visual & performance artist, and founder of The Embodied Femme. She provides group and private sessions in mindbody therapies, somatic movement, and sexuality integration training for health and vitality. She spent ten years studying and training with various renowned masters of embodied wisdom traditions, and has been working in the field of alternative healing since 1999.

