



Sustainability, Research, and Healing Journeys: My Experience at the AIA Conference

By ACHS Graduate Michelle Vine

I was so very fortunate to be selected to receive the scholarship to attend the Alliance of International Aromatherapists Conference through ACHS. My experience was very profound, especially since I recently graduated with my Diploma in Aromatherapy—Master Aromatherapist! You are missing a lot if you have never attended one of these in-person conferences!

The speakers talked on a wide range of subjects. Here are some highlights:

Dr. Robert Pappas spoke about his journey as a chemist and how the occupation found him instead of the other way around. He founded the Essential Oil University and created the most extensive online essential oil database. He also has lectures about essential oil chemistry that are free on YouTube.

Jonathan Benavides spoke about his experience using .25 – 5% dilution of essential oils in helping individuals with their mental health. He used respiration/direct olfaction, touch, visual stimulation, and olfactory training (in later stages). For individuals with panic/anxiety issues, he used very diluted essential oils to prevent the smell from being associated with “danger” and triggering an opposite response. For individuals who experience depression, he used oils with more of an essential oil concentration to help them blossom from blunted feelings and apathy to create an emotional response. When a patient reacted well to a smell, he used it to draw them out of their emotionless shell.

Lora Cantele, creator of the International Journal of Professional Holistic Aromatherapy, spoke about sustainability and what we can do as aromatherapists to ensure our modality survives. It does not include just us; it consists of the farmers, the distributors, the stakeholders, the policymakers, and the consumers. We all have a part to play in ensuring the plants we use survive.

Lorrie Hargis talked to us about the meridians of Traditional Chinese Medicine and how using essential oils and Bach flower essences can help bring us back into balance. She discussed how dis-ease typically starts in our energy field, or aura, and transmutes into our flesh. If our auras are kept strong, we can deflect dis-ease. She said that she had great



results using flower essences, that they help build up the energy in one's aura so when we are stressed, we can pull from the energy of the flower lingering in our aura instead of from ourselves.

Jacqueline Higgins and Judy Ratliff spoke to us about medical cannabis. With a jeweler's loupe, we could inspect the different aspects of the flower and see the trichomes, which hold the chemicals delivered to our minds and bodies once the flower is heated. We smelled the various constituents in the hemp plant, myrcene, limonene, beta-caryophyllene, and pinene, and compared them to what we could smell from the flower. They also showed us that where we sense the plant's scent in the nose determines how it will react inside us. If we sensed it lower in the nose, the plant had more sedating action; in the middle of the nose, more balancing, and higher in the nose (near the forehead), it was more stimulating (Higgins & Ratliff, 2024). I asked them if this was applied to essential oils, and they did not know, but they said I should try it on clients and see the results. I see a case study in my future!

Our Dean of Aromatherapy, Amanda Lattin, talked about Holism and how healthcare should not focus on just one aspect (like the physical) of an individual. We should focus on everything: our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual selves. There is a tool we can use, an online form called My Strengths and My Health, to measure a whole person's health. We can then use aromatherapy to assist someone in supporting their health journey. There is still much to learn about aromatherapy and whole-person health, but if we continue to provide data through research and case studies, we can come closer to an answer.

Jesse Hawkins spoke to us about how we can sustain and grow in aromatherapy by submitting our case studies. She was adamant that we dig out the case studies in our filing cabinets and submit them to the Case Study Collaborative. Doing this will only increase our knowledge database and give us more evidence to allow our modality to blossom into something great instead of sitting in the background of modern medicine. The more evidence we provide, whether the blend we created worked, adds to *all* of our knowledge. The more we submit, the more data we have!

We also had the AIA Research Academy panel speak to us about the launch, education, mentoring, and expansion of this new tool. They are using it to improve our modality by gathering high-quality research, shortening the knowledge, experience, and confidence



gaps, adding to the body of evidence that aromatherapy truly works, increasing the credibility of our practice, and empowering aromatherapists worldwide (AIA Research Academy, 2024).

Lastly, we heard from Robert Tisserand, the man who created the bible of aromatherapy safety. I was so honored to be in his presence! His takeaway was using essential oils in their entirety and not just the constituents. He based this on carcinogens found in essential oils, the fact that when the whole essential oil is used instead of parts, the oil works in synergy, and the fact that there are constituents that counterbalance other constituents that may cause cancer and other health concerns.

These were only a few of the many lectures we could listen to in person and virtually. There was so much knowledge given, and great questions were asked. We even learned when overhearing discussions other people were having! The AIA conference conveyed a lot of messages. One was sustainability, not only with our plants but also with our modality. If we do not save and use our precious flora wisely, aromatherapy may cease to exist! The second message is we need to provide research and evidence of how our blends work! Supporting the AIA Research Academy and submitting to the Case Study Collaborative will only preserve our future and that of future aromatherapists. The third message was helping people heal broadly. We need to consider the whole person and everything that is happening in their life versus just looking at symptoms of disease and throwing pills at symptoms. Engaging in aromatherapy opens doorways to other healing paths, whether Traditional Chinese Medicine, energy healing, using crystals, or herbalism. I met many people who branched out from their initial modality to incorporate another type of healing.

If you have never attended a live conference through AIA or another organization, you need to. The networking, the discussion, the new ideas sprouting, and the expansion of our craft all culminated in one place for three days. Being around people who only want good for others and to help people in whatever manner they can was exhilarating, uplifting, and deeply emotional. You cannot receive that sitting in your chair at home watching the conference virtually. So next time you see an announcement for an aromatherapy conference, really, really consider attending. You will come back wanting to conquer the world through aromatherapy and help people on their healing journeys!



References

Higgins, J. & Ratliff, J. (2024) *Medical Cannabis* [PowerPoint]

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