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### *Highlighting the value of complementary care*

#### **A Conversation With Suzanne Scurlock-Durana, CMT, CST-D, Developer of Healing From the Core (#1004)**

**by: The Upledger Institute  
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Healing From the Core recently joined CranioSacral Therapy, Visceral Manipulation, Lymph Drainage Therapy and Mechanical Link as one of The Upledger Institute's core curriculums in complementary care.

Previously taught through the International Alliance of Healthcare Educators, this workshop series focuses on ways to develop a strong therapeutic presence, nourish yourself with universal resources, maintain healthy boundaries that enable you to connect deeply with others without burning out, and rejuvenate under stress.

Modality developer Suzanne Scurlock-Durana, CMT, CST-D, has been an Upledger Institute instructor since 1985, certified in courses ranging from CranioSacral Therapy to SomatoEmotional Release. Here in her own words she shares her thoughts on what led her to create the Healing From the Core workshop series ~ and how it can benefit therapists in their practices and personal lives.

EDITOR: What first inspired you to develop Healing From the Core (HFC)?

SUZANNE: I was teaching CranioSacral Therapy and people in class would often say to me, "What's that thing you do before you put your hands on someone or when you're standing in front of the room? You look like you're doing something energetically that's important to the process." So I started wondering, what was I doing?

At that point I was standing at a crossroad. I had a background in CranioSacral Therapy and massage therapy. But I also had 17 years practicing yoga, Tai Chi, and many other disciplines that I brought to bear in how I chose to be energetically present with people.

Not many people did all those things then. Fifteen years later, of course, things have changed. But then, people seemed to operate largely from a right- or left-brained experience. And they didn't seem to know how to draw on all parts of themselves to cultivate presence.

So I started to examine and pick out the things I was doing that were most powerful. I began to realize it was my practice of grounding before I put my hands on someone ~ of making sure I was energetically "full" before I stepped into a personal connection. It was also the way I kept my energy field in my own body so I wasn't invasive to people when I touched them.

There were many ways I was doing this unconsciously. So I started bringing the techniques to my awareness so I could better understand and teach them to others.

EDITOR: Looking back, do you remember when you first started using those skills in your own life?

SUZANNE: I remember being in a dance performance in college where I played the role of a tree onstage. This guy actually had to climb up one side of me and down the other. To prepare I went through an internal process where I put down roots and felt myself having a strong trunk. It was amazing how completely I was able to see and feel myself being a tree. Once I did that it was easy for someone much heavier than me to climb in my branches.

So as I looked back I figured out, okay, it has to do with how you set your intention; with making an external connection to a strong, unconditional source. Like connecting to sunlight or the earth under us. There are so many different ways to find resources around us. Connecting to them and staying full energetically was the central part of the process.

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Then I started playing with how I would teach people. It's grown bit by bit since 1988 when I taught my first class in my basement.

EDITOR: Would you say the process is something of an internal ritual?

SUZANNE: It's the way you set your intention, but there's much more to it. It's the way you understand how the world works.

One of the first things I realized is, if I see myself as an island and I try to be strong for other people, I'm going to burn out. I may have large, natural energetic reserves, so it might take awhile, but eventually I will burn out.

So the first principle I teach is that we're surrounded by resources. By the earth's magnetic field underneath us. By the sunlight that gives us vitamins. By the air filled with positive and negative ions that can either nurture us or take us out of balance. There are many, many different ways to connect to what nourishes us in a healthy manner.

To get full energetically and nourish yourself, you use intention and ask, "What's around me that can nourish me right now?" It might be the coolness of the air. So I focus on that and feel a little cooler and a little more relaxed as I follow my breath for a few minutes.

Or it might be placing my feet flat on the floor and thinking about the earth under me right now. The earth's magnetic field pulsates at a level that's healthy. It charges us as human beings. There's research on this. If you get out in nature, something happens at a cellular level when the earth and our energy fields connect. So if I can teach someone how to sit and feel down into the earth and become connected, that's another way they can nurture themselves.

Sitting in the sunlight just enough to feel warmed and calmed is a resource. Or you can use a memory of a time when you were successful with something. Then the memory becomes a resource.

Basically, that's the first thing I teach people: how to "resource" themselves, to trust that no matter where they are, resources are available.

Next, they have to know how to feel inside whether they're connected to what nourishes them. For instance, if you're caught in an addiction, you're in a life-taking cycle ~ it takes you away from what's life-giving. But if you're not even cognizant, if you can't even register that you feel separated, then you don't know to move back into the direction of health.

You have to recognize you feel separated in the moment. And you have to want to get back to feeling connected to life.

This whole concept fits perfectly with CranioSacral Therapy because we teach our clients how to listen to their Inner Physician ~ the part that is deeply connected to the All, that knows what they need in any given moment. And we teach them to recognize resistance, or a sense of separation. With HFC, however, this lesson also applies to all aspects of life.

The other piece I teach people is that reality is how you're seeing it right now, which is not necessarily the objective truth about what's going on. So often we operate with a narrow lens that tells us how we have to be in order to be okay. But once you're able to widen that lens and see that you really are okay, then you can relax and let go. You're seeing the world differently.

Another aspect I teach is how to feel yourself in every cell of your body. Again, cranial work is right in line with this. We constantly try to help the nervous system organize and operate optimally.

This means communication between all our cells. To do that you've got to be okay being in every cell of your body. You can't be afraid of some aspect of yourself, or hide your light under a bushel. You can't downgrade yourself by stuffing everything in and keeping yourself smaller than you are. You need to be willing to be in all of yourself. When you are, there is an integrity to it that is magnificent.

EDITOR: It sounds like this work can help people in all walks of life, not just therapists.

SUZANNE: Absolutely. I began with people who were taking CranioSacral Therapy. Soon my administrative assistant wanted to take it, and then my computer programmer, my graphic designer and my organizational development people.

Everyone kept saying, "You're slanting this toward therapists, but it's good for anybody. It's good for our relationships, it's good for us at home." That's why there are no prerequisites to taking the first HFC workshop. It's going to help you wherever you are.

EDITOR: How many classes are in the Healing From the Core curriculum?

SUZANNE: We have the basic four-day class called Grounding and Healthy Boundaries. Then there are four upper-level workshops that essentially approach different topics at a more advanced level.

Once you understand my terms and language, and how I see and work with things, then you can really start to master being inside your body and being connected to your resources. That's when you can truly be enriched by the advanced workshops. They help you learn how to expand who you are internally.

In the advanced workshop, Expanding Present-Moment Consciousness, we dive into the power of being in your body in a full and present way as opposed to getting caught in past hurts and traumas, or being pulled into future worries and anxieties.

You learn how to expand yourself energetically. You learn how to expand how you see your life, and what you want from life. We have a lot of fun with that. We drum, move, sing, breathe, and spend time outside in nature as well as doing deep process work.

We also offer another upper-level workshop that encompasses a slightly different way of looking at the nervous system. It's called Healing the Nervous System: From Trauma Recovery to Ecstasy.

The basic premise is that the nervous system is the doorway through which we experience our world. Everything from the most traumatic experiences all the way through ecstatic Kundalini openings comes through the nervous system. The same principles are at work with each one: The response to trauma is to either freeze, run or fight. With any of those choices, you're dealing with a quality of holding yourself in the past, and that in itself a problem.

So in Healing the Nervous System, I work with people on ways to unfreeze the nervous system. We do some breath and movement explorations designed to facilitate letting go and allow new and healthier movement.

Just as in all my advanced trainings, participants learn hands-on protocols involving breath, sound, movement and intention to open all the systems of the body-mind-spirit for rejuvenation and filling. We work in pairs, small groups and the whole circle.

I just finished a class in which we did a whole hands-on ceremony, layering different sounds and breaths. We began with a breath that fills up the torso and organs. Then we added a breath that stimulates the fluid systems. We finished the layering with a very quiet breath that calms the nervous system.

I also hold an annual New Year retreat in Sedona called Release and Renewal. We go through a process of looking back over the last year and letting go of what we no longer want in our lives. I bring in a lot of my Native American studies to teach people how to pray the Medicine Wheel, how to ask from the bottom of their hearts for what they want, what they really feel called to create in every area of being: their spiritual lives, their thinking lives, their physical bodies and their emotions. Then we do a whole process on reclaiming your true voice.

The final workshop in the curriculum is my Practitioners' training, and that's the most advanced. It's designed for those who are ready to master the grounding and healthy boundary process in order to hold space for someone else in a consistent way. It doesn't mean the practitioners are beyond their own healing processes. I don't think we ever are. It just means they are far enough along that they are ready to focus on holding a healing space for others.

These are the people who are using it every day in their lives. They're teachers, they're therapists ~ they're people who need to know how to master having healthy boundaries and being connected to the world in a way that consistently replenishes and resources them. We also explore energy profiles and how to work with each one.

EDITOR: You mentioned that you have recently added hands-on work to the original four-day Grounding and Healthy Boundaries training. Tell me more about that.

SUZANNE: My focus throughout these workshops is on providing nurturing touch, no matter what the protocol. The majority of the original four-day training is done sitting in a circle with everyone working internally with their own systems using different explorations in breath and movement, and using intention the way we do with CranioSacral Therapy to move your awareness around your body.

On the last day we practice a hands-on protocol that is the foundation, in my opinion, that all the curriculums work from, whether we're talking about CranioSacral Therapy, Lymph Drainage Therapy, Visceral Manipulation, Mechanical Link or Healing From the Core. It involves the process of "being" present fully when you are working hands-on, independent of the skills you know how to "do."

This process of "being" amplifies everything you do from a technique perspective. That's why CranioSacral Therapy students often say they can feel the cranial rhythm much easier after taking this course. That's also why students who have taken this class have a much easier time holding space for the emotional processing that occurs in SomatoEmotional Release and Advanced CranioSacral Therapy workshops.

EDITOR: What are some of the principles that run through all your workshops?

SUZANNE: We have already talked about several of them. First, we are surrounded by resources that can nurture and fill us up. Second, remembering to be connected to your resources on a moment-to-moment basis as you work, and in the rest of your life. It's important to know that those resources are there, and to practice using them. You must have the energy habit if you want consistency in this area.

Third, to recognize that your lens on the world is just that, a lens, not the objective truth. If you are having trouble with something, you may want to widen your lens to access other possibilities for creative solutions. This happens at an energetic and feeling level, as well as at a concrete level.

The last two principles are that life operates optimally when we are full of what nurtures us, when we are in every cell of our being. I think of this as having a full container. A therapist with a full container is a lot less likely to pick up negativity from other people or the environment.

And of course you need to know how to recognize when you are depleted, and remember to move back in the direction of filling up again. If you can recognize that, you can make adjustments to replenish yourself in a healthy way, hopefully bypassing the addiction cycle so many people in our world encounter.

Throughout all of this, what I really want is to have access to what gives me joy in my life, and to help other people do the same. We learn a lot of valuable skills in this curriculum. I make sure that we laugh a lot as well.

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