

Out of the Chair and Into the Community – Quiescence After COVID-19



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Introduction

Aromatherapy's sustainability as a profession raises important questions regarding ethical sourcing, environmental impact, professional standards, social factors, and economic viability. This article will briefly discuss the current state of Aromatherapy as a profession, identify key challenges to its sustainability, and explore potential strategies for ensuring its long-term viability.

Aromatherapy, rooted in ancient healing practices, has evolved into a contemporary profession offering alternative solutions for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. As interest in natural remedies and holistic approaches to health continues to grow, so does the demand for Aromatherapy products and Aromatherapy as a potential career path. However, the sustainability of Aromatherapy as a profession encompasses more than just its popularity; it also involves ethical considerations regarding the sourcing and use of essential oils, the environmental impacts of cultivation and production, professional standards and regulation, and the economic viability for practitioners.

Ecological sustainability

One of the primary concerns regarding Aromatherapy's sustainability is the environmental impact. Essential oils are extracted from medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs), necessitating botanical cultivation and harvesting. Unsustainable harvesting practices, deforestation, habitat destruction, and overexploitation of plant species pose significant threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. Moreover, the intensive cultivation of aromatic plants may lead to soil degradation, water depletion, and pesticide contamination.

To promote ecological sustainability in Aromatherapy, practitioners and businesses can adopt ethical sourcing practices, prioritize organic and wildcrafted materials, support fair trade initiatives, and engage in reforestation efforts. Additionally, research into alternative extraction methods, such as carbon dioxide extraction and distillation from invasive plant species, can reduce environmental impact while ensuring a sustainable supply of essential oils.

Economic sustainability

The economic sustainability of Aromatherapy as a profession encompasses various factors,

including market demand, financial viability, and professional opportunities. While the global Aromatherapy market continues to expand, with projected growth driven by consumer interest in natural products and wellness therapies, individual practitioners and small businesses face challenges.

Competitive pricing, access to high-quality essential oils, regulatory compliance, and marketing strategies influence the financial success of Aromatherapists and businesses. Moreover, the lack of standardized education and certification processes may hinder professional recognition and limit opportunities for career advancement. The Aromatherapy community's economic sustainability can be enhanced through collaborative efforts within professional associations, registration with the Aromatherapy Registration Council (ARC), advocacy for industry standards, and promotion of evidence-based practices, thereby fostering credibility, consumer trust, and professional development opportunities.

Social sustainability

Social sustainability in Aromatherapy encompasses ethical considerations, inclusivity, and community engagement. To ensure safe and respectful care, practitioners must adhere to ethical principles, including informed consent, client autonomy, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. Moreover, promoting inclusivity and diversity within the profession is essential for equitable access to Aromatherapy services and education.

Community engagement initiatives, such as outreach programs, educational workshops, and partnerships with healthcare providers, can enhance public awareness of Aromatherapy's benefits and foster cross-disciplinary collaboration. By prioritizing social responsibility and fostering positive relationships with clients, communities, and stakeholders, Aromatherapists can contribute to the profession's long-term sustainability.

Sustainability as a profession

The field of Aromatherapy encompasses a diverse range of practitioners, including Aromatherapists, massage therapists, holistic health practitioners, and skincare professionals, among others. There is no regulation for Aromatherapy, unlike conventional healthcare professions. However, organizations such as the Alliance of International Aromatherapists (AIA) and other Aromatherapy organizations worldwide provide professional standards for practitioners and curriculum guidelines for schools that provide certification.

Professional standards and regulations are essential aspects of ensuring the quality and safety of Aromatherapy practice. While organizations like AIA provide guidelines for education and certification, the field lacks standardized regulation, leading to variability in practitioners' training and qualifications. This unpredictability can pose risks to public safety and undermine the credibility of Aromatherapy as a profession. The Aromatherapy Registration Council offers a board exam that, upon successful completion, provides registration and the credential of

Registered Aromatherapist® for Aromatherapists, ensuring the credibility of practicing Aromatherapists.

As previously mentioned, one of the primary challenges facing the sustainability of Aromatherapy as a profession is the ethical sourcing of essential oils. Many essential oils come from plants that are at risk due to overharvesting, habitat destruction, or unsustainable cultivation practices. Additionally, there are concerns about the exploitation of workers in the supply chain, particularly in developing countries where many essential oil-producing plants are grown.

Environmental sustainability is another primary consideration for Aromatherapy practitioners and industry stakeholders. Cultivating essential oil-producing plants can have significant environmental impacts, including deforestation, habitat loss, and pesticide pollution. Furthermore, essential oil extraction and production require energy and water resources, contributing to carbon emissions and water scarcity.

Economic viability is another concern for Aromatherapy practitioners, particularly those who rely on essential oil or Aromatherapy product sales as a primary source of income. The market for essential oils is competitive, with prices fluctuating due to supply chain disruptions, consumer trends, and marketing strategies. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Aromatherapy industry, disrupting supply chains and reducing demand for non-essential products and services.

Quiescence after COVID-19

Before the pandemic, more people were fast-tracking their Aromatherapy education online and earning their certification, but few went into practice. The pandemic forced everyone inside, and many practitioners had to close as face-to-face consultations were not an option. Most Aromatherapists pivoted to continue their education using online resources – schools, conferences, webinars, and summits during the lockdown. Some made the switch to offering education themselves. However, if we become a community of teachers, not practitioners, how does Aromatherapy move forward as a profession? Take a moment to consider where you are in your Aromatherapy career. Do you have the same passion and enthusiasm?

Consider how many clients you see each day, week, month, or year. Whatever the amount, do you consider that a viable practice?

Maybe it is time to reconnect with yourself and revisit your “why?”. Ask yourself this:

- Why did you want to become an Aromatherapist?
- Do you feel the same passion now as you did then?
- Are you putting in the same effort you did when you first started? More? Less?
- What steps have you taken, if any, to keep your practice viable?

Let's look at the word 'quiescence' as it relates to plants.

The physiological consensus defines latency or quiescence as opportunistic avoidance states in which growth resumes under favorable conditions. In contrast, the dormant state in higher plants is entrained by the organism's life history.

Quiescence is a fundamental feature of plant life, which enables plasticity and renewal of the somatic cell line. Cellular quiescence is defined by arrest in a particular phase of the cell cycle.

Quiescence is when the embryo is dormant and inactive. In this phase, the embryo in the seed has stopped growing. The non-dormant seed cannot germinate due to lack of suitable germinating conditions. The absence of favorable conditions, such as light, temperature, and moisture, triggers this phase. The rate of cell division is suppressed. The embryo resumes its growth when the conditions become favorable again.

I believe that conditions are favorable now that the pandemic no longer dominates every aspect of our lives.

“Growth resumes in favorable conditions”

I am saddened to see reduced attendance at live classes and conferences. I believe that COVID-19 gave way to a ‘new normal.’ It is less expensive to attend online, but we all found a way to pay for travel before COVID-19. Several conferences offer opportunities for scholarships or payment plans, room-sharing, and optional meal plans. We can gain much more by attending in person.

Camaraderie aside, the ability to engage with other practitioners and speakers is invaluable. Sharing our stories and experiences, successes and failures provides opportunities to learn and grow. The presentation or class takes on a very different vibe in person, as the questions asked propel the discussion. Some online events offer opportunities to ask the speakers and other attendees questions on chat platforms, but often your question goes unanswered; sometimes, when a presenter does answer, if you still need help understanding, there is little opportunity to pursue a dialog.

Additionally, engaging with online vendors is challenging. How often have you waited patiently at a vendor stall to purchase or to ask a question, only to find yourself listening to the vendor's response to another person's question and learning something new? We are in an aromatic business. Online tradeshow do not allow us to smell samples or feel the product (cream, oil, powder) before we buy.

Nevertheless, online events provide an opportunity to learn for those who can't afford to travel, whether for personal or financial reasons. Unfortunately, real engagement can be low. This leads to another question of validating participation. Some events allow you to register and download a certificate even if you never watched a presentation. This workaround is a disservice to you, your education, and your clients. I believe that in the future, some

organizations will be more discriminating about the continuing education certificates they accept for membership renewal or re-registration of the credential, as is the case with ARC.

Sustainable practice

Let's think about sustainable practice in terms of sustainable agriculture. With an eye toward protecting the earth, pesticides, herbicides, and artificial fertilizers are avoided, and more careful strategies are used to cultivate crops and increase soil fertility. Through these practices, the environment is not degraded and can sustain our food production. However, as farmers can tell you, maintaining the earth is not necessarily enough to sustain the farmers.

Farmers rely on following practices that have worked for others; they choose crops that can grow in the available conditions and find new methods or change direction when it becomes apparent that what should work is not working. If farmers want to sell their crops, they either grow what appeals to their customers or find ways to align with people's preferences. For example, inviting them to try a different type of tomato, one they're less accustomed to buying, and that is harder to cultivate.

For sustainable agriculture to work, farmers must have more than good intentions. They must have a quantity of knowledge and wisdom, and they need flexibility and the ability to flow with change. Farmers who can sustain themselves seem to hold a vision, and that vision drives them to creatively navigate challenges with the resilience that comes from knowing what they can accomplish.

Let's apply the analogy of sustainable agriculture to sustainable practice. The aromatic community isn't some commodity created for us; it is created solely by us and is in us. At a communal gathering, we are the ones who show up, plant seeds, and welcome those planted in us. We are the gardeners and farmers who create and nurture what is grown. And we are the soil out of which our community flourishes.

Showing up with and for each other is the very foundation of our aromatic community. For people joined in common practice, "community" means much more than a group gathered around a shared passion. Like the words 'communion' and 'unity,' this type of "community" is felt and understood as an essence of connection and relationship. We experience this connection as meaningful, educational, inspirational, and valued. The deeper we move into this shared experience, the more we sense community as something alive, in need of nurturing and sustenance. Sustaining our aromatic community is about sharing our stewardship. I find the comparison to agriculture compelling.

We live in a world of fractured communication, unjust societies, humanitarian crises, and ecological disasters, and, as individuals, these negative forces can easily tempt us to feel helpless and overwhelmed. The younger generation displays a lack of empathy, and more people are experiencing mental health concerns. My question turns to how our community can become

powerful, robust, and durable enough to face all that is coming our way, allowing us to identify those we can help.

Consider going back to the basics. Stress is the underlying cause of 90% *dis-ease*. Herein lies the arena in which Aromatherapy truly excels. Simple inhalation of a beautiful essential oil can comfort emotional or mental distress or soothe or distract physical pain.

What we need now is “radical resilience.” This concept is a call to commitment to strengthen ourselves. Showing up intentionally and being present for one another is the foundation of any community. In other words, come out and participate in community development, growth, and nurturing. Holding one another within presence is to witness how community envelopes our uniqueness and how we are reinforced and expanded in return. Recognizing the connection we share and sharing our knowledge and experience nurtures ourselves and our community. All we need is a compelling insight into why we should come forth and put in the time, commitment, and effort.

I have faith that we can live more proactively with the vast challenges as we become the creators of a radically resilient aromatic community. We can emulate visionaries like the resilient farmers who live inside the visions that guide them through their tasks and challenges. We, too, can live inside vision. We just need to be more disciplined and remember why we entered this field.

So, what makes a vision, and what makes it compelling enough for us to stand up to adversity and to nurture our burgeoning fortitude and flexibility? Resilient farmers want to raise abundant crops and pay their bills just like all other farmers. However, the sustainable farmer also needs a vision for the advancement of the whole farm environment.

This kind of visioning can hold all the components in a big picture. This kind of vision calls for transformation. Most great visions are transformative. Do we want to have such a vision? When we see the genuine big picture of what can be and what we can create, we move into a vision to inspire all we need to do. We can actively engage in the changes that will sustain us. May it be so. May we take part in making it so.

Strategies for ensuring sustainability

Addressing the sustainability challenges facing Aromatherapy as a profession requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration among practitioners, industry stakeholders, policymakers, and consumers.

Potential strategies

Ethical sourcing

Promoting responsible sourcing practices through certification programs, transparency in supply chains, and support for fair trade initiatives to ensure the sustainable cultivation and harvesting of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs).

Environmental stewardship

Encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming, agroforestry, and breeding practices, to minimize the ecological impact of essential oil production. Invest in research and development for more energy-efficient and environmentally friendly alternative extraction methods.

Professional standards and regulation

Advocating for standardized education (minimum curriculum guidelines) and certification requirements for Aromatherapy practitioners to ensure competency and safety. Collaborating with regulatory agencies to establish guidelines for labeling and marketing Aromatherapy products.

Economic development

Supporting small-scale farmers and indigenous communities involved in essential oil production through fair pricing, capacity-building initiatives, and market access programs.

Consumer education

Raising awareness among consumers about the importance of sustainability in Aromatherapy and empowering them to make informed choices about the products and services they use. Providing resources and educational materials on topics like plant conservation, ethical sourcing, and safe usage guidelines. Resources include the AIA, the International Clinical Aromatherapy Network (ICAN), industry journals such as the *International Journal of Professional Holistic Aromatherapy* (IJPHA), and the Airmid Institute, among others.

Strategies for sustaining the future of the practice of Aromatherapy

Define your niche

Having a particular area of specialty can set you apart from other practitioners and drive more business to you. Create a tagline that tells people what you do in one sentence. Additionally, this can help you maintain focus to become an expert in your area of specialty.

The most brilliant example of this I have ever come across is “Peeling moms off the ceiling since 1998.” by Leslie Irish Evans. I met Leslie at a conference in 2007. Her tagline tells people she deals with stress, focuses on moms, and how long she’s been in business in one sentence. In 2013, she published *Peeling Mom Off the Ceiling: Reclaiming Your Life from Your Kids*, which offers practical advice on self-care and stress management while also critically examining motherhood stereotypes. She built a practice and eventually a brand around this.

Take stock of what is available

Consider your space. Where will you consult with your client? You cannot perform massage or Aromatic Reflex Therapy without a massage table. You cannot make products for retail sale unless you have space to properly store the raw materials or the finished product. You must understand good manufacturing practices, labeling laws, and compliance with the US Food &

Drug Administration (FDA)/ Modernization of Cosmetics Regulation Act of 2022 (MoCRA) compliance.

Know your clients' preferences

If you make products for retail sales, are they what your clients want to buy, or are they what you want to sell? Do they appeal to your customers? Do they support their needs? Do you need to find ways to shift their desire? For example, are they looking for Frankincense (endangered) when Lavender is as suitable for their need? Educate them as to why you recommend a different essential oil.

Personal knowledge

An Aromatherapist sincerely wants to help their client. In their desire to be helpful, an Aromatherapist will occasionally attempt to create protocols for clients that may not be entirely appropriate based on their limited knowledge. An ethical Aromatherapist works within their scope of practice and knows when to make appropriate referrals.

Continuing education

Aromatherapy has become more scientific, and much more research has become available in the last 20 years. Stay up to date with the latest research, trends, and techniques in Aromatherapy. Attend workshops, seminars, and online courses to enhance your skills and knowledge. Read journals and current books.

Build client relationships

Focus on providing excellent customer service and building solid relationships with your clients. Listen to their needs, personalize treatments, and follow up with them to ensure satisfaction. Discuss incorporating Aromatherapy, relaxation, nutrition, and good sleep as a lifestyle change for better well-being.

Create packages and loyalty programs

Offer package deals or loyalty programs to encourage clients to return for multiple sessions. These kinds of incentives can help increase client retention and generate steady income. Offer value-added items to enhance your client's experience. A great example of this is from Aromatherapist and Naturopath Jennifer Jefferies. As a licensed massage therapist, Jen added bespoke essential oil blends to a carrier oil before performing bodywork on her clients.

Typically, she created these blends using her Aromatherapy Insight Cards, which also helped her cross-market them, along with products and services. She put a shallow bowl of water with floating Gerbera daisy heads under the face hole in her massage table and hung beautiful mobiles above it so her clients had something nice to focus on during the massage.

She often had a little extra massage oil left, so she would grab a cello bag filled with sea salts, pour leftover oil over the salts, and then tie it up with a little ribbon. She would give this to her client and encourage a warm bath in the evening. The aroma would bring them back to their

relaxing session. These small enhancements added value for the client and kept them coming back.

Diversify services

Expand your service offerings beyond traditional Aromatherapy sessions by diversifying revenue streams. Consider offering complementary services, such as Aromatic Reflex Therapy, wellness coaching, workshops, online consultations, custom blends, or retailing Aromatherapy products. Try the 5 x 4 method (or even 4 x 3): Blends x products.

Market your practice

Utilize various marketing channels, such as social media, email newsletters, and local advertising, to promote your practice. Highlight your expertise, client testimonials, and special offers to attract new clients. Always have a few business cards on hand wherever you go. You never know who you will meet.

While waiting in line to board a plane, a friend of mine struck up a conversation with the woman beside her. The airline experienced an issue that delayed boarding, so passengers were encouraged to settle in for an hour or two. They ended up talking over lunch at the airport to learn about each other's business.

As a result, my friend gained a contract to create a signature blend for the Versace Hotel in Australia. The staff diffused her blend in the hotel's common areas. Each guest room contained an Aromastone diffuser and a bottle of her blend, which the housekeeping staff would prepare as guests checked in, so they would walk into a fragrant room. The gift shop also sold small bottles of the blend.

Educate your potential audience

Write articles for magazines, newspapers, and blogs. Speak on public radio and local television programs highlighting businesses in your area. Offer activity workshops to assisted living centers and nursing homes. This is a great way to introduce Aromatherapy and gain clients. I did this, and a facility offered me a space to see clients on-site one day every two weeks.

Get into the community

Offer to be a guest speaker with various women's or men's support groups, conferences, hospitals/clinics, businesses, libraries, museums, and senior centers. Children are the future. Visit a school and give a presentation on plants and their importance as food and medicine. Let them engage their senses in tasting plants and smelling essential oils. Ask them how it makes them feel. Foster their interest and discuss what is happening to our plants worldwide and how they can help. Do you work with children? Speak at a parent's group or school. Meet people at their location and inspire them. Be the gardener planting seeds and cultivating your garden.

Build confidence

Explore the case studies you currently have and get them published or add them to the Case

Study Collaborative. Do you find you have several case studies about headaches? Write a paper on the use of Aromatherapy for headaches and publish it in a peer-reviewed journal. The peer review process sounds a bit scary, but the feedback from your peers can be very constructive. It can lead you to ask better questions in your consultations, take better case notes, and become a better writer – all of which builds your confidence. Clients want to work with a practitioner who is confident in their abilities.

Support your peers

Divisiveness and animosity have no place in a healing community. We should lift up our peers' accomplishments for the greater good of our community. Additionally, we should share our knowledge by mentoring those who will follow in our footsteps.

Network

Connect with other professionals in related fields such as massage therapy, holistic health, or skin care. Networking can lead to referrals and collaborative opportunities that can benefit your practice. Find ways for them to introduce you to their clients. For example, create a diffuser blend for anxious patients in a dental office. The dental office and its patients benefit from your work, and you gain referrals from the dentist to your practice. Find ways to work collaboratively.

Prepare your “elevator pitch” and practice it so you are always ready to share (in brief) what you do and how you can help.

Maintain professionalism

Uphold high standards of professionalism and ethics in your practice. Adhere to industry regulations, maintain proper licensing and insurance, and ensure a clean and welcoming environment for clients.

Stay organized

Implement efficient systems for appointment scheduling, client records management, and financial tracking. By keeping an eye on your company's logistics, you can streamline your operations and focus more on client care.

Seek feedback

Regularly gather feedback from clients to understand their experience and areas for improvement. Use this feedback to refine your services and enhance client satisfaction.

Self-care

Take care of your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Practicing self-care techniques such as Aromatherapy, meditation, and regular breaks can prevent burnout and help you sustain a long-term practice.

Return to your roots

Aromatherapy has become more scientific, and research has increased over the last 20 years.

We must consider where we were when we started and make it more accessible. Going back to basics, remember this: stress is the underlying cause of 90% of all *dis*-ease. What's better at addressing stress than the simple inhalation of essential oils? With the rise of multi-level marketing companies, we shifted our focus to safety and scientific research, minimizing our roots.

Think back to when you first qualified in Aromatherapy. Do you remember your enthusiasm when you initially became an Aromatherapist? You wanted to hang out your shingle and help everyone, but you soon learned that clients didn't just show up because you earned your certification. What did you do?

You wrote educational articles to inform the public about Aromatherapy and your practice. You spoke to people about the benefits of your work and your education. You attended as many classes and conferences as you were able to. You read books and journals. You made beautiful blends and shared them with family and friends to help you spread the word about your practice. You created social media posts, created infographics about safe Aromatherapy use, wrote blogs, taught workshops, became a public speaker for small groups, joined an Aromatherapy organization or two, maybe even served on a committee or two, and shared your knowledge with anyone who would listen.

We need to open more doors to students. Let them interview you for their school papers. Give them advice. Be a mentor. When you started, you wrote papers and maybe even books. You were passionate and enthusiastic. In other words, you were proactively engaged and nurtured your garden (business). Look at the examples set by Sylla Sheppard-Hanger, who said: "If you see a need...do it no matter how small."

When the Twin Towers came down on 9/11, she and a few others joined together to create the United Aromatherapy Effort (UAE). They provided complementary care to the first responders so they could get back in there and do their job. The UAE, via the Red Cross, also supported families displaced by Hurricane Katrina and wildfires in the southwest. Their efforts continued in firehouses and with veterans. As Sylla says, anyone can do it! If you've engaged in any of these activities, show a newcomer to the community how to do it. Pass the torch. Meet people and inspire them. Create activities or classes that spark interest in the community.

Tend to your community garden (aromatic community). Offer classes to educate nurses and CNAs to show the value of aromatherapy in clinical settings. Encourage them to use patches and inhalers. Once in the clinical setting, clients will want to buy for their home care. Speak to the Activities Director at an elder care facility and offer to create an aromatic activity for the residents. Once in, it is easier to engage them in providing aromatherapy products for use in the care homes or even your services once a week. Bring it to schools. Get them involved in growing plants, harvesting, and preparing their food. Talk with them about nature's medicine; let them smell essential oils and become engaged. Kelly Ablard and Frauke Galia wrote an

excellent book for inspiring children. Buy a copy and read it to the children in a library or classroom. Share the importance of our plants and the earth. Plant the seed! Reach out to a local yoga studio or meditation center and offer to create a unique blend for their business. Then, show them how to use it safely and sustainably.

You must be a pollinator in this field. By implementing these strategies, an Aromatherapist can create a thriving practice that attracts and retains clients while maintaining professional integrity and personal well-being.

Conclusion

Aromatherapy offers a unique blend of therapeutic benefits, drawing upon ancient wisdom and modern science to promote holistic well-being. However, its sustainability as a profession hinges on addressing ecological, economic, and social challenges. Examining the current state of the Aromatherapy industry, analyzing its environmental impact, discussing economic viability, and addressing ethical considerations provides insights into the long-term sustainability of Aromatherapy as a profession. Aromatherapy can evolve into a sustainable profession that enriches lives while respecting the planet and its inhabitants by prioritizing ethical sourcing, supporting economic viability, and fostering inclusivity and community engagement.

A prominent figure in Aromatherapy said to me last year, “Aromatherapy, as we know it, is dead and buried. We are talking about smell and touch. How do you learn that online?” How sad. I say it's not dead, just hibernating. COVID-19 forced everyone indoors, and while on their computer, a quiescence took over. Practitioners have become inactive. Being dormant allows for activity to occur again. Nurture your garden. The conditions are favorable!

Valarie Kaur, visionary and advocate for Revolutionary Love, tells us (and I paraphrase), “Discomfort is the beginning of transformation.” She encourages people “to have the courage to sit in our discomfort...” (Holznagel, 2020). “It’s okay to inhabit whatever emotion arises as you’re waking up, the key is not to get stuck in it [but] to move through it, and find people who will help you breathe and push through the labor of becoming something new on the other side of it.” Inspiration and opportunity are all around. It’s time to re-engage with the public and the aromatic community. Continued collaboration, innovation, and advocacy are essential for ensuring the long-term viability of Aromatherapy as a profession in the ever-changing landscape of healthcare and wellness. It’s time for transformation.

Get out of the chair and into the community. 

Reference

Holznagel H. (2020). In this rare moment of social change, Valarie Kaur urges ‘revolutionary love.’ Available: https://www.ucc.org/in_this_rare_moment_of_social_change_valarie_kaur_urges_revolutionary_love/. Last accessed 16 July 2024.