

Letter to the Editor regarding article Health effects of voluntary exposure to cold water – a continuing subject of debate, by Espeland, et al

Richard A. Reinhart ^{a,b}

^aProfessor of Medicine (Emeritus), East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA; ^bEmeritus Physician, Marshfield Clinic Health System, Marshfield, MI, USA

Sir,

I read with interest your article on the potential health benefits of voluntary exposure to cold water. (1) I wish to point out an earlier example of cold-water therapy reported in 1886 by Sebastian Kneipp in Woerishofen, Germany. (2,3) The Kneipp water cure used, among other methods, application of cold-water baths. As I research the topic of the history of establishment of training schools for nurses, I came across the establishment of the nurse training programme and the beginning of St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield Wisconsin that dates to the early 1890s. (4) The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother established the original nurse training programme were sent from Mellrichstadt, Germany to the USA to begin mission work ultimately settled in Marshfield, Wisconsin. A parish priest, Father Joseph Joch persuaded the sisters to begin the Kneipp Water Cure in 1893. This programme was popular and led to the success of the newly established St. Joseph's Hospital by attracting patients. The newly attracted patients supplied income for funding of improvements in the hospital building. The rest is history.

In 1895, Dr. Karl Doege, a founding physician of the Marshfield Clinic, convinced the sisters to suspend the water cure and go back to a traditional hospital. The outcome is the Marshfield Clinic Health System consisting of physicians, staff and facilities now providing rural

access to healthcare in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Kneipp water cure was in part responsible for the establishment of a future medical centre.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Richard A. Reinhart  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1206-4373>

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