

WELLNESS

Deepak Chopra lends name to Squamish addiction centre

BY JENNY LEE
VANCOUVER SUN

Deepak Chopra is lending his name to a new Vancouver-owned residential addiction centre near Squamish.

Chopra Centre's relationship with Paradise Valley Wellness Centre is the spiritual teacher and best-selling author's first formal affiliation with an addiction treatment centre.

"The Chopra Centre will be providing the curriculum for the Paradise Valley Wellness Centre," Chopra Centre co-founder Dr. David Simon said in an interview.

"We'll be training teachers and staff to implement the programming. We'll be having a close relationship to ensure people who are coming to the Paradise Valley Wellness Centre will have an authentic Chopra Centre experience while going through detox and transformation."

"The Chopra Centre component will primarily focus on making certain everyone attending Paradise Valley Wellness Centre masters the process of meditation," Simon said.

"There will be daily meditation. Twice daily yoga classes. There will be a rich two-part curriculum, one part focused specifically on the issues of

people going through recovery and the second part focused on the mind body component and how to live a more balanced life."

Chopra Centre is licensing its brand and curriculum to Paradise Valley in return for a percentage of revenues generated, Simon said.

The owner of Paradise Valley, Nir-mala Raniga, is a management accountant who also owns five Lower Mainland outpatient addiction treatment centres that prescribe methadone and follow a harm reduction philosophy.

The Paradise Valley centre is Raniga's first residential centre, and the first to be affiliated with Chopra Centre.

"We're well aware that just teaching people to meditate, do yoga and eat healthily by themselves are not going to necessarily get to the root of the underlying pain that's driving the addictive behaviours," Simon said.

"So the first part of the curriculum is really dedicated to this deeper psycho/social/spiritual exploration as to why did a person get into this pattern of behaviour that gave them perhaps a moment of relief but then caused such widespread physical, psychological and relationship pain."

"We have an idealized goal and

whether or not once reality hits we'll be able to fully implement it [is yet to be seen]," Simon said.

"One of our goals is not to have any smoking on the property. That's really groundbreaking in addictions. We're going to try and attract those people who are not really, 'I want to stop drinking for a few months,' but 'Change my whole life.' If we position this program authentically, we will not attract those people who are looking for a quick fix and substitute methadone for heroin."

The Paradise Valley centre, built on 10 acres along the Cheakamus River near Squamish, is scheduled to begin accepting clients in January. Fees will be \$6,000 for the first week, and \$4,000 per week thereafter. A typical client is likely to stay for four to six weeks. The 16-bed facility offers a psychiatrist/addictionologist, a physician, yoga and meditation instructors, an art therapist, nutritionist, acupuncturist, massage therapists and residential support workers.

"We have an addiction program in place," Raniga said. "They have a curriculum they've developed. We will tweak."

Raniga got into the addiction business in the late-1980s. "I had acquaintances who had struggles and I felt that they needed treatment and that treatment wasn't available here in B.C. at the time," Raniga said.

There was only one clinic in Vancouver and people who didn't pay their

treatment fees were cut off from their medication, she said.

Raniga's outpatient clinics now employ 50 people, including 25 physicians, nine of whom are psychiatrists and 10 who are addictionologists. She charges patients \$65 a month, and charges the physicians a percentage for managing office and patient administration.

"I make a living and I'm very content with how things are going. There are some clinics that are not balancing out, and some clinics doing okay in terms of collecting fees. I think we are doing the right thing and believe in what we are doing."

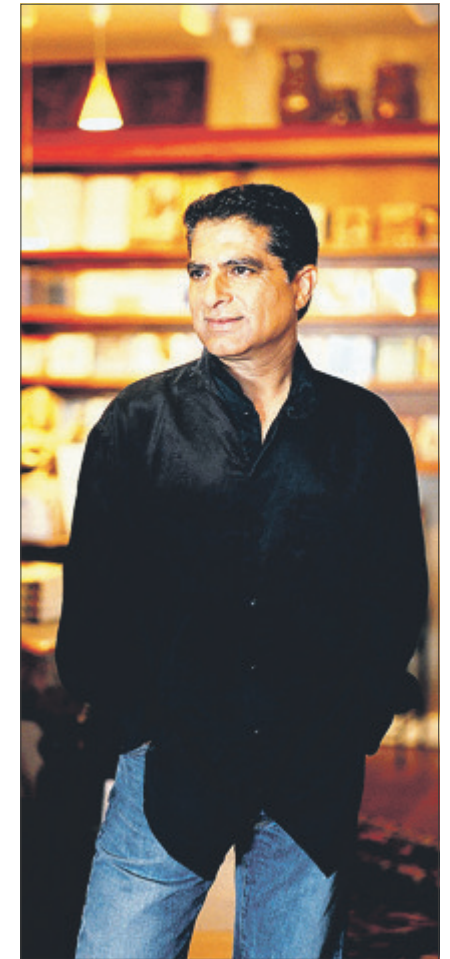
Finding a suitable property for her residential centre was challenging. Acquiring property, rezoning and a business licence took 2 1/2-years.

Raniga made a commitment not to take any court-mandated clients and to provide 52 patient weeks at no charge to Vancouver Coastal Health, Sea to Sky Community Services and the Squamish Nation.

There are now about five private residential treatment centres in western B.C., Raniga said.

She first attracted Chopra's attention at a Whistler workshop several years ago by acknowledging a Hindu sacred day devoted to spiritual teachers.

She became interested in Hinduism and spiritual teachings after her mother died in the mid-1980s.



Deepak Chopra's Centre will provide the curriculum for the Paradise Valley Wellness Centre.

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