



■ Spas have a huge role to play in disease prevention said Chopra



■ GWS chair Susie Ellis said there's been a 'purposeful evolution'

The 2015 Global Wellness Summit took a step away from its traditional spa focus to provide the industry with inspiration for future development. Katie Barnes reports on the highlights from Mexico

Only 5 per cent of illnesses are genetic. Most other disease is lifestyle related and avoidable and the spa and wellness industry has a huge part to play in helping people to achieve optimal health. It was this statement by alternative health guru Deepak Chopra that had delegates at the 2015 Global Wellness Summit (GWS) sitting up and paying attention.

Chopra, who addressed a full house at the summit in Mexico City in November, is an advocate of self-healing (see SB15/4 p36). He explained that scientists no

longer believe that genes are fixed – they respond to everything we do, including what we eat, how much sleep we get, the exercise we do and our emotions (especially stress). “Think of your epigenome [the chemicals which govern genes] as a light switch or a thermostat,” said Chopra. “It can turn off harmful genes and switch on good ones” according to the lifestyle decisions you make.

Although spa operators might not be able to act on this new science immediately, it gives an insight into how they can potentially develop their businesses in the future: ‘a spa for your





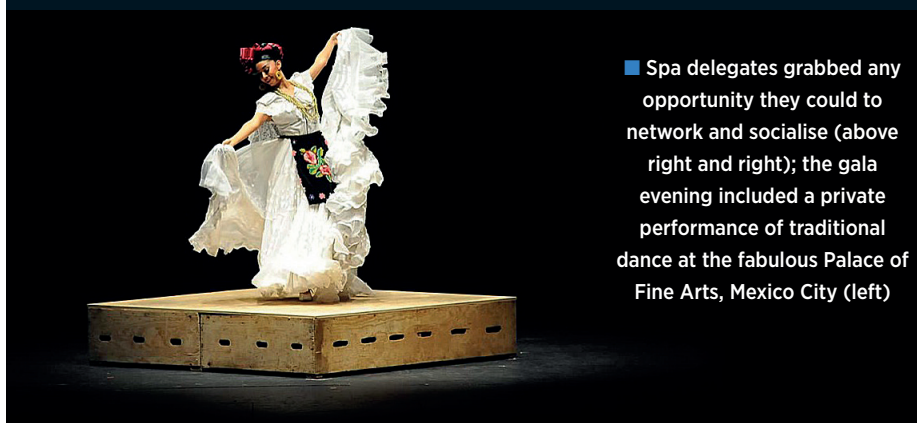
■ The *Spa Business* team reported live from Mexico over the three days



■ Passionate spa educator Mary Tabacchi tunes in



■ Fun and lively sessions entertained delegates



■ Spa delegates grabbed any opportunity they could to network and socialise (above right and right); the gala evening included a private performance of traditional dance at the fabulous Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City (left)



genes' if you will. It provides inspiration for growth beyond the typical routes for spas and other sessions at the summit covering areas such as workplace wellness, psychodermatology, cancer and the medical community took this tack too. It was a deliberate move by the event organisers who dropped the word 'spa' from the summit's title to reflect its more diverse wellness content. As such there was a broader range of delegates with professionals from clinical institutions, nutrition and fitness sitting alongside spa leaders, government officials and travel and tourism experts. Noticeably, more

than 50 per cent of the record number of 450 delegates were first-time attendees.

Susie Ellis, chair and CEO of the GWS explained: "This year's theme is Building a Well World and it could not be more appropriate. The wellness world is broader than it ever has been. We started out as a fragmented spa industry nine years ago and collectively helped to usher in a wellness movement... It's been a purposeful evolution of our name and focus. But it's not because we've abandoned our roots in spa, beauty and hospitality, but rather because we've recognised the opportunity to open up as we cast a wider net."



■ Chopra with his copy of *Spa Business* which features an exclusive interview with him





Claudia Aguirre



Samer Hamadeh



Katherine Johnston

■ (Left to right) Thought provoking sessions on psychodermatology; the business of massage by Zeel; and workplace wellness research

### ► INDUSTRY INSPIRATION

Each year the summit places a special emphasis on one or two topic areas and in Mexico it was workplace wellness (see SB15/4 p64) and the convergence of the wellness and medical worlds.

SRI International, working with the Global Wellness Institute, revealed early findings on a report on wellbeing at work. Workplace wellness is a US\$40bn (€37bn, £27bn) industry globally but many schemes are missing the mark – only three out of 10 people participate – and the solution is to integrate wellness into company culture. The full SRI report will be released in February and we summarise what this means for spas on p60.

A powerhouse panel with speakers from the Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic and Duke University were asked if the clinical and wellness sectors are starting to work together. The consensus was “yes they are”

“ Massage is an impulse buy – 55 per cent of Zeel consumers want a treatment within four hours of thinking about it ”

and it's more than just a fad. As healthcare systems move from disease management towards preventative measures they're embracing complementary medicine. Growing competition in the medical world also means that clinicians are looking to spas for examples of customer care. “They [spas] do a great job of providing the right experience,” said Dr Adam Perlman of Duke Integrative Medicine. “I think this has created a level of interest and willingness to engage that we didn't see a few years ago.”

In a fascinating presentation, neuroscientist Claudia Aguirre, who sits on Comfort Zone's scientific committee, outlined the skin: brain connection. She spoke about the impact of emotions on skin, how it reacts to light to effectively tell the time, and newly-discovered C-tactile fibres in hairy skin which tell us how we feel when we're touched. She said: “We're only just beginning to untangle the neuroscience behind how the skin is represented in the mind and how the mind is then eventually represented in the body (particularly the skin)... By understanding the link you can learn to treat skin in a more holistic way.” Using more than just products to treat the skin is something *Spa Business* also predicted in its 2015 *Spa Foresight™* (see SB15/3 p36).

### ZEEL PROFESSIONAL

Samer Hamadeh, founder and CEO of Zeel spoke about optimising the business of massage. He set up his at-home massage company because there are so many missed appointments in the industry. “We discovered the industry was really inefficient,” he said. In his experience, massage is an impulse buy – 55 per cent of Zeel consumers want a treatment within four hours of thinking about it. Many spas struggle to meet this demand because of staff shortages or restricted opening hours – 64 per cent of Zeel appointments occur after 5pm, and 21 per cent after 9pm.

Hamadeh revealed the launch of Zeel Professional, which spas can use to find therapists for last minute bookings rather than turn customers away. You can read more on this in *Spa Business* SB15/3 p70. ►



■ An impressive line up of medical experts spoke about wellness