

ONCOLOGY MASSAGE—Does it make a difference?



By Joan Veselack-Gennarini, LMT
OWNER OF REKINDLED SPIRITS

Oncology Massage has definitely gained credibility. In 2003/2004 when studying Massage Therapy, I was told not to massage Cancer Patients. Massage Therapy was thought to spread cancer by applying pressure through massage strokes to the muscle tissues. This pressure would push cancer cells to other areas of the body known as metastasis. Talk about putting the fear into a Massage Therapist. Cancer was definitely a contraindication for Massage Therapy in 2003.

Thank goodness to research in the past decade that has determined genetic alterations are the driving forces behind metastasis. Pressure alone does not cause a cancer tumor to become invasive. The science behind the cellular structure of cancer cells and its DNA will not be discussed, but many articles have been prepared on this subject matter.

In 1992, Touch Research Institute (TRI) was established by Tiffany Field, Ph.D. at the University of Miami School of Medicine with a start-up grant from Johnson & Johnson. Several studies have been conducted from 2000 to 2012 to determine the benefits, if any, by applying Massage Therapy to Cancer Patients. TRI studies have produced beneficial results with both controlled and random group testing. Beneficial Results range from reduced anxiety, depressed mood, anger and stress levels to improved sleep quality.

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A simple TRI study of Foot Massages applied by nursing staff in 2000 to modify distressing symptoms of pain and nausea in hospitalized cancer patients; provided results in reduced perception of pain, nausea, and relaxation when measured with visual analog scale. The Foot Massages were 10 minutes, 5 minutes each foot on 87 patients.

A more recent TRI study in 2009 of a randomized controlled trial of women with breast cancer receiving Massage Therapy, provided results in a decrease of deterioration of Natural Kill (NK) cell activity occurring during the radiation and therapy. It also lowered heart rate systolic blood pressure.

Does Oncology Massage cure cancer? Of course it doesn't. However, when applied by a trained Massage Therapist, it has helped many patients and family members improve their quality of altered life from a cancer diagnosis. Remember caregivers also go through increased anxiety and stress levels and can also benefit from Massage Therapy.

What type of training should your Massage Therapist have? At least 24 hours of Oncology Massage Training with a supervised session of applying the Oncology Massage techniques to a Cancer Patient.

I took my Oncology Massage Class in summer of 2012, and it was very enlightening as a Massage Therapist to understand the major types of cancer and their treatments. We learned the lighter types of Massage Therapy used during the different stages of cancer, its treatments, and for lymph nodes removed. These are all important techniques and questions to ask your Massage Therapist.



I am a 4th round cancer survivor, and I can truly say that hands on massage had a healing effect on my body and psyche. Joan has certainly given me a great deal of body comfort that does relieve my tight muscles. Having a massage would definitely help many patients.

- Jean

Recently, I had abdominal surgery to remove a tumor. The surgery was stressful and held in my neck muscles. When Joan massages these muscles, my sleep is improved. After surgery, your body needs to release the chemicals (anesthesia). I do feel massage helps improve circulation which in turn helps remove the toxins.

- Christine, BSN

In 2012, I was diagnosed with breast cancer which began the journey of chemo-treatments, a mastectomy and radiation. Your body, the treatments, and the cancer are at war with each other. You are stressed in a new way. The oncology massage by Joan, which is tailored to your specific situation, eased the stress and left me at peace and relaxed. It should be done as often as possible.

- Lynn

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 and began getting massages from Joan soon after. After my surgery, I had extensive rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. The bodywork Joan did on me helped me to relax, reduced the tension in my back and shoulders and helped me sleep better. It made a real difference in my recovery.

- Maryanne



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