**Massage Today**

October, 2012, Vol. 12, Issue 10

**Hospitals Embracing Massage**

By Kathryn Feather, Senior Associate Editor

An increasing number of hospitals are throwing their doors open to qualified massage therapists as savvy health care consumers are requesting massage therapy to deal with certain health conditions.

The research showing the validity of massage as a drug-free option for patients to consider has been steadily growing over the last few years and hospitals are finding it a profitable business practice to offer massage and other complementary therapies to their patients.

According to the latest American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) industry facts, almost 10 percent more people received massage for a medical or health reason. Forty-four percent of adult Americans surveyed who had a massage between July 2010 and July 2011, received it for medical or health reasons as compared to 35 percent the previous year. Of the people surveyed who had a least one massage in the last five years, 40 percent reported that they did so for health conditions such as pain management, injury rehabilitation, chronic pain management or overall wellness. As more people--especially baby boomers--request these services, and have the discretionary income to pay for them, hospitals and other health care providers are taking notice and making changes to the services they offer.

Finding a Career

"Massage in a hospital setting is ideal," said Edie Black, a registered nurse and licensed massage therapist working at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. "As I provide massage therapy to inpatients at our hospital, I see my patients finding a deep sense of relaxation, pain relief and an increase in body awareness."

Black paints a positive relationship between patients and the massage therapists. "Due to the nature of the hospital setting, each patient benefits differently. Our hospital has one floor dedicated to children with cancer and blood disorders and the majority of massage consults are found there. Some [patients] are looking for pain relief as they recover from surgical procedures such as amputation or reconstruction after tumor removal. Some are anxious about the hospital and the painful procedures they have experienced," said Black. "The massage therapist can help by offering that ‘safe' time, not only for the patient but for the family as well."

Elizabeth Schroeder was hired by Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City in 2008 as an Occupational Therapist in 2008 and became more interested in complimentary therapies such as massage while she was in school. "I had been researching why the therapeutic use of touch was benefiting the patients I was treating. As I found more evidence-based research in massage, I spoke with my supervisor at the hospital regarding becoming licensed and she was very supportive. Schroeder has been a licensed massage therapist for a little over a year now.

Schroeder says "pain related conditions are the most frequent referrals: idiopathic arthritis, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, and neck, back or joint pain. I do use massage frequently with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders and Sensory Processing and Modulation Disorder." The survey also found that 59 percent of massage consumers surveyed said they would like to see their insurance cover massage therapy.

Educating Doctors and Consumers

According to the AMTA survey, massage therapists received an increase in referrals from health care professionals, with the number of nurses recommending massage doubling in 2011 and 96 percent of the massage therapists surveyed receiving at least one referral every six months from a hospital or medical office. The survey shows that, on average, massage therapists received about four referrals per month, twice as many as in previous years.

There is also a growing body of research that therapists can point to--and other health care professionals are noticing--that shows the positive benefits and effectiveness of therapeutic massage. Recent studies have examined the effects of massage in dealing with a variety of specific health conditions such as cancer related fatigue and pain, low-back and chronic neck pain, lowering blood pressure, reducing the frequency of headaches, boosting the body's immune system and even easing the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal.

"Our patients and their families have provided positive feedback, including scheduling their planned admissions for treatment around the days the massage therapist is available," said Black. And hospitals are taking notice of the demand. The Mayo Clinic in Minnesota offers a hospital based massage therapy course for therapists who want to join the hospital health care team. The program is divided into three modules and takes two months to complete and requires completion of a 500-hour minimum massage therapy program. The Mayo Clinic states that "through the course, participants will gain an enhanced understanding of the utilization of massage therapy and integrative medicine in the acute care hospital setting. Participants will experience self-care exploration, a team-based approach to integrative health care and scope of practice, navigation and documentation in a medical record, establishing therapeutic relationships and treatment planning." This program is only offered twice a year and is limited to 12 students to ensure that therapists receive close one-on-one instruction and a more comprehensive experience. The Mayo Clinic campus includes extensive facilities including an outpatient complex and research areas, in addition to the well-known hospital. Placement for therapists completing this instruction is very good, according to the Clinic.

True Integration

For those already working in hospitals, they know they are a part of an integrated health care approach to wellness for their patients. At the Children's Mercy Hospital, Schroeder sees this integration first hand. "I am in contact with every patient's doctor regarding plan of care and progress toward goal directed therapies. Specifically for pain-related diagnoses, I am frequently in contact with the patient's psychology support systems. In all of these relationships...I find these providers to be open and willing to see the effects of massage as a modality used in treatment."

Candace Linares has been a massage therapist for 19 years and has worked in the hospital setting for the last seven years. In her experience, the doctors and nurses she works with ask for massage therapists on a regular basis. "I believe there is a reliance and confidence regarding massage services to assist patients' special health concerns," she said. As hospitals and doctors become more aware and accepting of the benefits and effectiveness of massage therapy, and as a greater number of patients continue to request these services, the demand for more massage therapists who are ready and able to become competent and contributing members of the health care team will continue to grow.