

[IMAGE]

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Cameron West, CMT, of Fillmore, CA.

By Claudette Laroche, RN, LMT, NCTMB

Author's Note: Professional of Note is a column devoted to recognizing individual practitioners and what they are contributing to the profession. Each article will highlight a unique feature of a practitioner's professional practice.

The purpose of the column is take note of people who are not necessarily nationally known, but who are nonetheless making a significant contribution to the field.

Imagine the most peaceful moment you have known in your life, and add that dimension to the experience of floating in warm water.

Cameron West, a person of spirit, fire and energy who is able to enfold and nurture you in a floating realm of peace and tranquility, (such as we like to ascribe to the time when we were in utero), can help facilitate you to that most relaxing moment.



Cameron is a 1980 graduate of the Santa Barbara School of Massage Therapy, and a California-credentialed teacher of adaptive physical education. To create her practice and business, Aquatic Integration, she has combined over 20 years as a massage therapist, over 15 years as an aquatics rehabilitation educator and Watsu practitioner, and over four years as an instructor of the therapeutic modality called Watsu, the coined acronym for water shiatsu, as developed by Harold Dull of California.

Watsu (WATER shiatSU), an aquatic bodywork modality that incorporates the stretches, pressure point massage and principals of zen shiatsu, utilizes the principals of water - natural buoyancy, resistance and

warmth. Technically, Watsu involves neuromuscular re-education, utilizing gentle mobilization of the joints and soft tissue. The Watsu client is held and supported while being moved, floated, massaged and gently stretched in 96-98 degree water. The hydrostatic pressure of water helps to increase circulation, as the body is continually moved. Watsu emphasizes being with and trusting the body to seek its own natural balance. It is a process that can take place on an emotional and a physical level. During a session, the practitioner's awareness is drawn to the client's breath and natural movement, which guides the practitioner's work with the client. The "holistic" aspect of Watsu ensues from the experience of deep relaxation and nurturing in a session which can facilitate a meditative state, freeing the body from stiffness and painful areas, and allowing for more efficient tissue repair. As Cameron states:

"Western therapy and Eastern medicine meet in these profound warm water treatments. These are exciting times for alternative types of therapy. The Western medical arena, (including, but not limited to doctors, physical therapists and insurance companies), is recognizing the need to integrate wellness programs into mainstream therapeutic and fitness programs. Watsu provides an ideal method to help relax, expand and re-pattern the body-mind connection. If you are a therapist looking to bring a sense of integration and spirituality into your practice and increase your awareness of the holistic approach, learning or receiving Watsu could set you on a new path."



Cameron with client Sandra Pearson. It certainly initiated Cameron into taking the helm to chart a new course for her professional and personal life. Her work as director of Aquatics for Tri-Counties Easter Seals, Ventura, California, was a springboard to pursuing further options, working one-on-one with clients in the water to enhance their progress. Cameron decided to attend the Watsu Instructor Training Program at the School of Shiatsu & Massage in Middletown, California, and put herself on the focused course of becoming an Instructor. Cameron states, "I knew this modality needed to be more accessible and noticed in the therapeutic arena to earn its recognition as a valid aquatic therapeutic modality."

As a client of Cameron's, William D. Hervey, PhD, of Ventura, CA, states that "she is an exceptionally talented practitioner of the watsu technique. Over the 10-year period that Cameron has been treating me, I have never experienced any flare-ups with my rheumatoid arthritis after receiving Watsu, though I often experience flare-ups after dry-land physical exercise."

Cameron practices what she teaches, an optimum state of health for the individual, by incorporating self-care into her everyday life. She practices meditation, Yoga, and Tai Chi and incorporates at least one of these forms into her schedule almost every day. She also exchanges an underwater dance technique called "waterdance" with her husband Greg, a writer and graphic designer. They learned waterdance as a means of enhancing their relationship via increased time spent together doing something they both love.

Cameron's professional acumen, her supportive spouse, and her joy as a parent of a school-aged son have facilitated the process of developing her goals in a holistic environment for herself and family. Cameron is quite excited as she recounts that:

"In July 2000 Greg and I put our pool up and built a beautiful yoga/treatment studio. We call it the AquaZen Center. Here is where I do my private practice three days a week and have scheduled workshops on the weekends, Friday through Sunday. Our 20-foot, circular, above-ground pool is kept at 96-98 degrees depending on the time of year. There is an outside enclosed hot and cold shower with a dressing room. Recently, the center added a new deck and put in a lift for wheel chair clients. Our workshops, which accommodate up to 10 students, include a student manual, and incorporate "land classes" (held in the yoga studio) to build a better understanding of body mechanics and manual techniques."



Cameron with client Jim Darling. Cameron is very dedicated and organized in creating innovative approaches to teaching watsu as well as implementing strategies in the water on her clients with and without special-needs. "I work on a wide variety but the population that I work with mostly includes those with osteo and rheumatoid arthritis, low back dysfunction, fibromyalgia,

Parkinson's, and amputations. Waterdance with the amputee client is quite powerful because of the magnitude of stretch you can receive under the water. My reputation is primarily built on aquatic therapy rehabilitation and my ability to adapt techniques to clients' needs."

Cameron is clear about her aquatic course. Her short-term goal is to finalize a joint venture with an already existing state licensed massage school to establish a satellite school at her AquaZen Center. Watsu, waterdance, and adaptive technique classes will be on the schedule for students from the school to take as electives to include in their massage curriculum. She excitedly awaits approval for this venture from the state of California.

"My long-term goal/vision is to have a school of aquatic integration where students can come and take many different courses all applicable to bodywork in the water. I will have visiting teachers for courses such as CranioSacral, Feldenkrais, to name a few, and then standard classes such as Watsu, waterdance, and various adaptive techniques. This vision also includes developing a course of my own adaptive techniques with another Watsu practitioner and physical therapy assistant (PTA), Janice Castelbaum. This course will be primarily for rehabilitation facilities that wish to train their staff. There will have to be some red tape to cut through with the state to implement this goal since aquatic therapy does not have it's own recognition or licensing."

As I listen to her speak and see what she has produced, I sense her determination will obliterate that red tape. Cameron is already teaching Watsu and adaptive courses at aquatic facilities all around the country. She is also on the board of directors for WABA, the Worldwide Aquatic Bodywork Association, (established by Harold Dull) and is very active in the creation and implementation of the association's educational standards committee, which oversees the development of the Watsu instructor training program.

I bet you need a Watsu, Cameron! Call your husband!

For more information, please call Cameron West at Aquatic Integration, (805) 524-1580.

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