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## **Carol Kane Neilson, CMT**

By Claudette Laroche, RN, LMT, NCTMB

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*Author's Note:* Professional of Note is a column devoted to recognizing individual practitioners and what they are contributing to the profession. Each article highlights 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. If you've ever experienced a helium balloon ride, you know the feeling of peace as the balloon lifts with a surge, then smoothly takes its course: soft as a whisper, but strong in its hold.

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This is how I would describe Carol Kane Neilson's "takeoff," literally and figuratively, when she births and develops ideas. Her current passion, a unique, first-of-its-kind program, is the Vermont Race for the Cure Breast Cancer and Massage Project.

Carol's idea was birthed after attending the AMTA National Conference in Washington, D.C., in October 1998. At the conference, Carol took Cheryl Chapman's workshop, "Introduction to Mastectomy Massage." By the time her return flight landed in Vermont, Carol had a proposal outlined on her laptop computer. Within three days, a venue, presenter, and funds to operate were in place. Cheryl Chapman of New Jersey jumped at the chance to teach; the Vermont Race for the Cure event in Manchester, VT would be the site; and funds would be provided by the Vermont Committee Against Breast Cancer.

Talk about passion and motivation!

Carol's goal was to combine the Vermont Race for the Cure fundraiser for the Susan G. Komen Foundation with a free massage clinic for breast cancer survivors, along with a mastectomy massage workshop for massage therapists. The therapists would also partake in a sports massage workshop, preparing them to

provide pre- and post-event sports massage the morning of the running race. Fellow massage therapist and partner George Glass, LMT, would teach the sports massage component and oversee the sports massage the day of the race. Carol organized, planned, implemented and oversaw the entire project through its debut in July 1999. Forty-eight massage therapists from the northeast attended the program, providing massages to 55 cancer survivors and sports massages to 330 race participants.

Carol decided to continue the quest for more sponsorship. To implement her goal of seeing this project spread to a national level, she prepared a grant proposal to present to the Komen Foundation. It was a lengthy preparatory process, one that successfully set her course.

As a result, the second massage workshop, held just prior to the July 2001 Race for the Cure event, was funded through a grant from the Vermont Affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. The workshop was sponsored by the Vermont Chapter of the AMTA, Carol, and George Glass. Also obtained were a major anonymous donation from the community and services from Ignition, Inc., a local marketing firm.

The Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation was established in 1982. It is "an international organization with a network of volunteers working through local affiliates and Komen Race for the Cure events to eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease." In addition to funding research, the Foundation and its affiliates fund community-based breast health education, breast cancer screenings, and treatment projects for the medically underserved.

The 2001 workshop, attended by 38 therapists, emphasized physiological and emotional benefits of therapeutic massage, as well as positioning and massage techniques for the breast cancer client. According to Carol, "the workshop blends theoretical information with clinical expertise. It provides unique training and then the opportunity to apply the new knowledge in a hands-on situation at the massage clinic for survivors the day before the race." She also mentioned that the free massage session, given by the massage therapists who were trained in the workshop, is self-directed by the receiver -- the breast cancer patient/survivor. The therapist takes his or her cue from the person receiving the massage, and only goes as far as the person is comfortable. At the 2001 clinic, a record 79 sessions were given to survivors!

Carol highlights the essence of what transpires this way: "For the survivors, being comforted with touch is a wonderful thing. For some of the women it is their first experience being touched after their surgery or radiation treatment. It is often very emotional, but we provide a safe place for the massage."

Cheryl Tardy, a massage therapist from Maine, wrote to Carol after the workshop to tell her "...what a profound experience I had. I returned back to practice as a much better therapist."

Susan Rawls, a breast cancer survivor and Carol's client of one year, said: "I can't believe the difference in one year, how good I feel and how much I am able to do. It's a wonderful place to be. Massage was a medical necessity that helped me regain more than 60 percent mobility in my shoulder after completing treatment for breast cancer in late 1999." Susan has continued with weekly massage therapy, which she credits as "essential to my health and the hope that massage therapy will become a standard treatment in breast cancer recovery."

Carol and her partner George have just moved into a new healing arts center, Mountain Healing Arts in Manchester Center, Vermont. The center houses seven treatment rooms, allowing for three massage therapists, one acupuncturist, one psychiatrist and one physical therapist to provide services.

Working on clients five days per week, Carol averages 36 client massages per week, all hour-long sessions. (More hours than I like doing in a week!) Her focus in her practice is medical injury rehabilitation and recovery. Techniques she employs are neuromuscular, deep tissue, myofascial release, and muscle energy release. She has been in practice for 10 years, and clients come to her primarily via word-of-mouth.

Carol also takes care of herself by receiving a weekly massage from her partner. When I asked Carol what she does for physical exercise and stress relief, she quipped "I muck the barn and load the elevator with bales of hay!" In her spare time, she oversees the care of her "menagerie of five horses, 10 cats, four dogs, and three birds," calling herself an "animal drunk!"

Carol, who graduated with honors from the Boulder School of Massage 10 years ago, is active in the AMTA Vermont Chapter, serving as secretary and education chair. She also is the wonderful DJ for the dances at the New England Regional Conference held every March. I would describe her as focused, detailed, organized, compassionate and passionate about whatever she does.

At the AMTA National Convention in September 2000, Carol received the AMTA National Humanitarian Award for her dedication in caring for breast cancer survivors.

Carol's long-term goal is to implement her model project in towns and cities across the country. She hopes that future funding will be made available for national promotion through a public relations firm that would like to donate some of their time as a community service. Because of Carol's dedication of time, energy,

spirit, and love for humanity, I'm sure her goal will be realized.

This article is especially timely because October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. If you would like to make a donation to the Komen Vermont Race for the Cure, please send it to:

Komen Vermont Race for the Cure

P.O. Box 2496

Manchester Center, Vermont 05255

Your donation may help achieve Carol's long-term goal of having model projects across the United States!

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