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Hospitals Starting to Recognize the Value of Massage Therapy

By Kathryn Feather

With millions of baby boomers entering their proverbial "golden years," and interest in complementary and alternative medicine growing exponentially, it's no wonder that hospitals across the United States are beginning to embrace massage therapy as a viable and important component of patient care.

Patients are requesting additional treatment options and hospitals are beginning to realize the benefits of not simply treating the condition or disease a patient has been diagnosed with, but also treating the person behind the disease. With studies being conducted that suggest the effectiveness of massage in helping cancer patients and others facing debilitating illness (see www.massagetoday.com/archives/2006/05/11.html), hospitals are beginning to add therapists to their staff.

And hospitals are utilizing massage therapists with expectant mothers and other special-needs patients as well.

This trend has provided massage therapists with new and exciting opportunities within traditionally restricted health care fields, a point underscored by the latest American Hospital Association (AHA) survey. For the first time, the association's annual survey has singled out massage therapy. The AHA survey found that a large number of consumers and health care providers are using massage therapy and bodywork for pain management and other health issues.

The survey also found that massage is among the most popular complementary and alternative medicine therapies offered in hospitals. Of the 1,007 hospitals that responded to the survey, 82 percent of hospitals offering complementary and alternative medicine include massage among their care options, with more than 70 percent using it for pain management and relief.

"Massage therapists are helping to heal patients, staff and the entire medical system by simply and profoundly reminding people, through touch, of the place of stillness and compassion within us all - the

inner spark and connection with divinity from which all healing flows," said Laura Koch, founder and director of the Hospital Based Massage Network, an organization that "supports massage and touch therapists pursuing integration of complementary care into mainstream medicine through their work."

One example of this exciting trend is Winchester Hospital's Community Health Institute in Winchester, Mass. The institute recently added two new massage therapists. The two will join the four therapists already working at the institute; all are considered employees of Winchester Hospital. The therapists focus on the specific needs of the patient; specializations include pre- and postnatal care, geriatric care, and massage for cancer patients and for those suffering from chronic pain.

The Community Health Institute supports Winchester Hospital by providing patients with a variety of alternative and complementary therapies. It's just one of the many facilities starting to pay attention to research on the benefits of massage and their patients' requests for more health care options, including massage therapy.

Resources

1. Leichman A. "Hospitals focusing More on the Mind-Body Connection." www.northjersey.com. March 28, 2006.
2. "Hospital's Taking Notice of Massage Therapy Benefits." Press release, Feb. 6, 2006, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine.
3. "Winchester Hospital Welcomes New Massage Therapists," *Winchester Star*, March 30, 2006.
4. The Hospital-Based Massage Network. For more information, visit www.hbmn.com.



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http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2006/05/04.html?no_b=true