

## **Working With Injured or Ailing Patients**

By Vivian Madison-Mahoney, LMT

Do we heal patients? No, of course not. Nobody can heal anyone. Healing comes from within, and it takes time. We can, however, help facilitate the healing process in a number of ways: by working to alleviate pain and discomfort; by helping to correct negative conditions that inhibit the body's natural healing processes; by educating patients on the inner workings of their own bodies; and by teaching patients how they can participate in their own healing.

Our ability to help patients is based largely on the fact that we, as massage therapists, really care: We take time with our patients; we listen; and we try to make them feel special.

In most cases, hands-on therapy works best to alleviate pain and suffering; however, showing concern for our patients' lives outside of their medical conditions can also help to improve their attitudes - and changes in attitude can help improve the physical body.

In our facility, our patients understood that we were not in it for the money, but to help improve their conditions. Part of our job was to help them understand that returning to work as soon as possible was necessary to promote healing. A main problem I have seen during my years of working with injured or ill patients is that massage therapy has been the "court of last resort," so to speak. Sometimes, patients are treated with every type of medication, physical therapy, or other treatment before we see them. By the time they come to us, their prospects of "getting better" have become almost impossible, because their memory cells are programmed to feel pain.

### **What Constitutes "Getting Better?"**

Can people really improve? Sometimes, we are only able to help patients feel well enough to "get through it," until time heals the injury. I remember an insurance adjuster who was upset that a patient was receiving massage therapy covered by insurance. "I hate that the insurance pays for this guy to FEEL BETTER," she

said. I told her that massage therapy is doing the same thing as prescription drugs, surgery and other medical treatments: it helps him feel better. It certainly wasn't to make him feel worse.

If physicians prescribe durable medical supplies, drugs or physical therapy, insurance adjusters do not get upset. Why is it a big deal to prescribe massage therapy? Because they know that MASSAGE THERAPY MAKES PATIENTS "FEEL BETTER"! Maybe we should call it "PAIN THERAPY"; then the problems with insurance companies might go away.

What you do for an injured patient is beneficial and important - you can change their lives. You can also change your own life if you do it with love and caring, and if money is not your only motivation. Success and money will come in time if you truly care for those who need your assistance.

### **Knowing When to Treat**

It is up to the massage therapist to know if he or she is qualified and capable of performing therapy for a specific medical condition. If you do not know what to do, then admit it and refer the patient to someone who does.

Still, 100-percent healing is not possible for every condition. There are things you may do one time that will seem to relieve a condition, only to have it return by the patient's next visit. What works for one patient may not work for the next patient with the same condition. If you do your best and the patient does not improve within a reasonable amount of time, his or her physician may no longer refer the patient to you; moreover, you should not want to continue to treat them if they are not showing some signs of improvement.

If you are billing insurance for the therapy, the insurer may not pay you for very long if you cannot show productive functional outcome. Insurers look for changes that can return the patient to employment, help them remain on the job, or return them to what they were unable to do prior to treatment. This is not always possible, but the intention to do so is necessary; so is thorough documentation to this effect.

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