

# Medical Massage

by Brandi Schlossberg

## Touch Helps Patients Heal



**Bambi Mathay**, massage therapist to cancer patients at Harvard Medical School's Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts.



**Pamela Hiser Montuy**, preoperative massage therapist at West Park Hospital in Cody, Wyoming.



**Tammy Clay**, massage therapist at Riverside Center for Behavioral Health in Riverside, California.



**Pauline Buller**, postpartum massage therapist for patients at hospitals throughout Minnesota.

Massage therapy is finding a home in hospitals across the country, where patients are reaping benefits that range from reduced pain to more peace of mind. Peer-reviewed research, patient demand and personal experience are among the driving forces behind this increased acceptance of massage as part of our medical system.

**W**e spoke with five massage therapists who work with patients in hospitals from coast to coast. Their clients are diverse, spanning the spectrum from cancer patients to postpartum moms, but the main goal of these massage therapists is the same: to make each patient feel better.

### The palliative care MT

JD Elder's clients are seriously ill. He is the massage therapy program coordinator for the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, New York. His job is to help manage the symptoms and stress of patients, thereby increasing their levels of relaxation and comfort.

"We use a technique I developed called the micro-holding technique," said Elder, who is a graduate of the Swedish Institute College of Health Sciences in New York, New York. "It is a gentle technique that is safe and effective for relaxation and symptom reduction."



**JD Elder**, massage therapy program coordinator for the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, New York.

According to Elder, who has been a licensed massage therapist since 1984, it was necessary to develop this method to massage such severely ill patients.

"We had to condense and modify the standard Swedish massage techniques, because we found we couldn't do a one-size-fits-all massage session with seriously ill patients in the hospital setting," said Elder, who has been the program's coordinator for the past 11 years. "Most of our patients have many conditions and medical

therapies happening to their bodies, which don't allow for a massage as usual—bruising, ventilators, amputations, skin conditions, intravenous lines, ports, drains and feeding tubes.

"With these patients," he continued, "there may be only a small area of a specific muscle group that is available to safely and comfortably massage."

A full-time clinical team member and hospital employee, Elder receives referrals to patients in palliative care from a number of sources, including social workers, chaplains, doctors and nurses.

"I see the benefits of massage for hospitalized patients as providing relaxation, which can enhance the management of symptoms, such as pain, anxiety and depression," said Marianne Gelber, a nurse who works with Elder at the Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute. "In addition, patients receive benefits from human touch, which is a universal need and might not otherwise happen for someone who is seriously ill."



Read "How to Network with Physicians," by *TherapyWorks'* James R. Lehman, L.M.T., N.M.T., at [www.massagemag.com/marketingphysicians](http://www.massagemag.com/marketingphysicians).

## The preoperative MT

Mere minutes before surgery, patients at West Park Hospital in Cody, Wyoming, receive a visit from massage therapist Pamela Hiser Montuy. She is employed by the hospital full time to provide massage for these preoperative patients.

"It's a standing protocol," said Hiser Montuy, who graduated in 2007 from the Arizona School of Massage Therapy in Tempe, Arizona. "Every patient who comes through the surgical services department—even if it's for a colonoscopy—is offered a massage for free."

The sessions take place in the preoperative area, with the curtain pulled in on the patient's bay for greater privacy. These massages last about 15 minutes, during or right after the IV is inserted.

"Massage therapy eases tension, reduces anxiety and calms the patient before surgery," said Jennifer Ball, registered nurse and outpatient supervisor for the hospital's surgical services department. "It also distracts the patient during a simple

procedure, such as the IV start."

Preoperative patients at West Park Hospital may choose between a massage for the back or feet. As for technique, Hiser Montuy said she uses a firm and comforting touch, blended with a bit of trigger-point therapy.

"If the massage is too light, it tends to make the patients more tense," she said.

Among the benefits of massage before surgery, research conducted by staff at West Park Hospital has shown it helps with the management of both stress and pain, lowering patients' blood pressure and cortisol levels before and after surgery.

"As far as pain control, we've found that getting a massage before surgery increases endorphins, and after the surgery patients are less likely to take as many narcotics for pain," Hiser Montuy said. "They feel better longer because the endorphins are still in their system and their cortisol levels are lower."

Hiser Montuy also provides free massage for West Park Hospital's postpartum patients and maintains a private on-site massage suite for paying clients from inside and outside the hospital.

## The mental health MT

For patients being treated for psychiatric conditions or chemical dependency, massage therapy may help ease not

only physical pain, but also emotional suffering. At Riverside Center for Behavioral Health in Riverside, California, massage therapist Tammy Clay works to bring such benefits to inpatients.

"When I walk in the hospital, I feel like I'm a fireman running into a burning building," said Clay, who received her training at Hands-On Medical Massage School in Redlands, California. "The patients are so excited to see me, because they know I bring them relief. They know I'm not there to poke them with needles—I'm there to make them feel good."

The massage therapist began her work at Riverside Center for Behavioral Health in early 2010, as an externship required to complete massage school. According to Clay, the hospital was not offering massage at that time, but staff agreed to bring her on board in this volunteer capacity.

"Had I not done my externship there, actually being present working with patients and nurses and doctors, I never would have been hired there," Clay said. "They needed to see my work and get the feedback to understand how much this helps."

When the externship was complete, she was hired immediately as an independent contractor, working three days a week from 2 to 5 p.m. Clay sees both psychiatric and chemical dependency patients at the hospital, based on their doctors' orders.

"I have a dedicated room for massage, and the patients come to me when the medical staff has scheduled them an appointment," she said. "I tailor the massage to whatever they have going on, from basic Swedish to neuromuscular therapy."

These 30-minute sessions aim to calm the patients and help manage their pain, whether they are withdrawing from drugs or struggling with severe depression. According to staff at the hospital, massage therapy works.

"It helps patients focus on themselves," said Cynthia Harris, a licensed clinical social worker at Riverside Center for Behavioral Health. "Self-care impacts their health."

## The oncology MT

For the past eight years, massage therapist Bambi Mathay has been providing services to cancer patients at Harvard Medical School's Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, Massachusetts.

"My role is to be part of the care team, providing a safe and effective massage treatment for our patients, integrating the massage with their traditional care," said Mathay, who graduated in 2001 from the Muscular Therapy Institute in Cambridge, now the Cortiva Institute in Watertown, Massachusetts.

As an employee of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Mathay is scheduled to see six cancer patients per day, in stages that can range from early diagnosis and in treatment to survivorship or terminally ill.

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members of the integrative-care team, among others, all serve as referral sources for cancer patients who come in for massage.

"Massage is a useful way to reduce stress, which is so common in our patients," said Jay R. Harris, M.D., professor and chair of the department of radiation oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. "As a radiation oncologist, [I know] massage can also be very useful in addressing some of the soft-tissue effects of our treatments."

According to Mathay, anxiety and pain are the top two conditions her clients with cancer present, along with fatigue, insomnia, depression, neuropathy and nausea. Mathay said she uses a variety of techniques, from Swedish massage and energy work to myofascial release and trigger-point therapy.

"I may also do some scar work and lymphatic drainage techniques if patients need it," Mathay said. "The techniques I use are defined by what the patient is coming in for and where they are in their journey."

These massage sessions take place in a massage room at the Zakim Center for Integrative Therapies, where patients come to receive other forms of complementary care as well.

"Most of our patients here value their massage as much as they value their traditional treatments," Mathay said. "They find that it goes hand in hand in, providing them with the healing they seek."

### The postpartum MT

When Pauline Buller arrives, new moms know it's their turn to be nurtured. Buller is part of a team of massage therapists employed by Bavia Health to provide postpartum massage in hospitals

throughout Minnesota.

Bavia Health was founded in 2008 to blend massage services into postpartum care, while absorbing the administrative aspect away from the hospitals. The concept was well-received—Bavia Health now serves 14 hospitals in Minnesota and one in New Jersey.

New moms or their loved ones call Bavia Health directly to book this out-of-pocket service, and the massage therapist arrives at the appointed time, one or two days postpartum.

"Through this collaboration, we have not only increased the health of the maternal community, but we have also increased patient satisfaction in the care they've received," said Darlene Spiegelberg, nurse manager of the family care center at Fairview Southdale Hospital in Edina, Minnesota.

Each massage therapist employed by Bavia Health has been trained to work with the postpartum population. Buller graduated from Northwestern Health Sciences University in Bloomington, Minnesota, and completed an externship at a Minneapolis hospital. She also holds an advanced certification in prenatal and postnatal massage and bodywork.

Buller said the benefits of massage for postpartum mothers include reducing edema, alleviating muscle pain, easing fatigue and creating a peaceful state to enhance bonding between mother and baby.

"Massage therapy and bodywork can provide emotional support during a critical transition into motherhood, especially for first-time mothers," Buller said. "The overall goal is restoration of a pre-pregnancy state."

The techniques she uses include Swedish massage, lymphatic drainage, myofascial release, aromatherapy and reflexology, among others. According to Shana Karle, who recently received a postpartum massage through Bavia Health, the service helped immensely.

"She began my foot massage while I was breastfeeding, and it was heaven," Karle said. "I was so much more relaxed than I thought possible, and my fussy daughter was even calmer."

"The entire treatment eased some cramping and helped me feel less tense, and the hot towels worked wonders on my swollen ankles," she added. "It sounds weird, but just this one event helped me feel so much more ready to go home and begin my new life as a mother of two."

### Expanded touch

For massage therapists who would like to work in a medical setting, these five hospital-based practitioners emphasize the importance of proper education, advanced skills and hands-on experience.

"Take a hospital-based massage course, participate as a volunteer in a hospital setting and apply for any externships that may be offered by area hospitals," Buller said.


Clay suggests offering free services to hospital staff, so they can feel the benefits of massage before hiring you to provide

the service to patients.

"They really need to experience you, your touch, your technique and your character," she said. "You need to do more than approach them and discuss the benefits of massage—you need to let them experience what you do."

The future appears bright for massage therapists who hope to play a role in the well-being of hospital patients. As more doctors take an integrative approach to treatment and more patients seek complementary care, the presence of massage in the medical setting is expected to expand.

"Hospitals, chiropractors and integrative medicine doctors are increasingly engaging massage therapists as part of their medical team," said Chris Pichereau, director of education for Cortiva Institute in Tucson, Arizona. "We foresee a more integrated approach to health care that combines allopathic treatments with clinical massage for improved healing."

Brandi Schlossberg is an avid bodywork client and full-time journalist based in Reno, Nevada. She has written recently for *MASSAGE Magazine* on many topics, including "Create an Outdoor Massage Room for a Natural Setting" (June 2011), "Market a Specialty: How to Build Buzz About Your New Services" (May 2011) and "Easy Steps to Success: Create a Massage Practice that Stands Out" (April 2011). 

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