Effect of Massage Therapy for Postsurgical Mastectomy Recipients

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This quality improvement pilot study evaluated the effect of massage therapy on pain, anxiety, and overall well-being in women who received mastectomies at a busy hospital practice. Participants reported a significant reduction in pain, stress, and muscle tension, as well as an increase in relaxation. Oncology nurses should consider the feasibility of massage therapy as a valuable nonpharmacologic pain management strategy.

Methods

This project was conducted from March 1 to May 31, 2010. Integrative massage therapy was offered to mastectomy recipients from three surgical services on postoperative day 1 by a certified massage therapist with a physical therapy background. Each massage session was performed by the same therapist for consistency. Prior to initiation of the pilot, the massage therapist spent a day observing a certified massage therapist with a physical therapy background. Each massage session was performed by the same therapist for consistency.

Results

Participants reported a significant reduction in pain, stress, and muscle tension, as well as an increase in relaxation. Anxiety and fatigue were reduced, and patients had a greater sense of well-being postoperatively. Participants also noted improved sleep quality, decreased pain, improved muscle relaxation, and increased energy levels. A total of 35 patients responded to the survey (56% response rate); all felt that massage therapy was effective in helping to reduce stress, and 34 believed it was very or somewhat effective in reducing muscle tension. In addition, 29 (83%) reported that massage therapy was effective in reducing fatigue, creating a general feeling of wellness, and improving sleep quality and their ability to think clearly. Although the study was small, the findings demonstrated that massage therapy may help patients with breast disease reduce stress and feel better overall (Pruthi, Degnim, Bauer, DePompolo, & Naray, 2009). As a result, the current pilot study aimed to evaluate (a) the effect of incorporating massage therapy into a busy breast surgical hospital practice and (b) the feasibility of a fee-for-service model.

Conclusions

The results of this pilot study support the use of massage therapy for postsurgical patients. massage therapy can improve postoperative well-being, reduce stress, and enhance a general sense of wellness among patients with breast disease. Future research should include a larger sample size to further validate these findings.