

Value of Massage Therapy for Patients in a Breast Clinic

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This article examines interest in massage therapy and other forms of complementary and alternative medicine among patients with breast disease. Surveys were mailed to 63 patients who had a breast abnormality or a recent diagnosis of breast cancer and received complimentary massage therapy at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, from February to April 2005. Thirty-five patients responded (56% response rate). All participants felt that massage therapy was effective in helping them relax, and 34 felt that it was very or somewhat effective in reducing muscle tension. More than 75% 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 this study was small, the findings show that massage therapy may help patients with breast disease relax and feel better overall.

Patients who suspect or recently were told they have breast cancer can experience high levels of anxiety. A 2004 study at Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates using the Impact of Event Scale showed that patients with abnormal mammograms have higher anxiety levels than patients with normal mammograms, even when they learn that the results were false-positive (Barton et al., 2004). Anecdotal evidence provided by the breast diagnostic clinic and breast cancer clinic staff at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, also suggested high levels of stress and anxiety among patients evaluated at those clinics. Events that may cause anxiety and stress include learning the results of a breast biopsy, receiving a new diagnosis of breast cancer, or undergoing evaluation for a palpable or mammographic abnormality.

A large-scale study of 1,290 patients with cancer at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center showed that massage therapy is associated with substantive improvement in symptom control (Cassileth & Vickers, 2004). During a three-year period, patients receiving massage therapy showed significant improvement in pain, anxiety, fatigue, and depression.

Physicians in the breast diagnostic clinic at Mayo Clinic evaluate patients with various breast issues, ranging from pain to cancer. The internists in the breast diagnostic clinic work with colleagues who specialize in breast imaging, medical oncology, radiation oncology, surgery and plastic surgery, genetics, physiatry, and psychology to develop treatment plans that meet the needs of each patient.

The multidisciplinary team sought to determine whether offering massage therapy to patients while they wait during their episode of care and between appointments reduces the stress experienced during visits. In particular, the team wanted to learn whether patients would be interested in mas-

At a Glance

- ◆ Patients with breast disease reported benefits from complimentary massage therapy.
- ◆ Cost is a factor that negatively affects patients' interest in complementary and alternative medicine, including massage therapy.
- ◆ Massage therapy was effective in reducing fatigue and creating a general feeling of wellness, suggesting its value in helping patients cope with cancer treatment.

sage therapy if it was provided at no cost or for a small fee. In addition, the team wanted to know whether patients derived value from massage therapy and whether they were interested in receiving massage therapy on subsequent visits. Finally, the team sought to determine whether patients with breast disease are interested in receiving other forms of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

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