

AAMT

"Massage therapy is moving forward through communication with Cancer Council's and GP's; international support and Australian training programs".

by

Eleanor Oyston,  
CT(ASC), DipRM, Bowen Therapist, ATMS, BTFA, AAMT, AIMA  
Paul Harris fellow, Australian of the Year Nominee 2009.

2008 has proved to be a year of awakenings for the oncology and massage professions.

The Quest for Life (QFL) Foundation and the NSW Cancer Council (NSWCC) funded a visit by Gayle MacDonald, the American author of 'Medicine Hands' and 'Massage for the Hospital Patient and the Medically Frail'.

As a major part of the NSWCC sponsorship Gayle was commissioned to write an eight-page information sheet called 'Massage and Cancer: an introduction to the benefits of touch'.

This booklet was launched at the end of March 2008 at a lecture given by Gayle at the Sydney Museum, which was attended by over 100 Australian therapists, and marked the beginning of an exciting series of events.

The NSWCC printed 8,000 copies of the massage information sheet expecting this to last about 2 years. At an international aromatherapy conference in Sydney in mid October, 7 months later, Vivienne O'Callaghan announced in her presentation for the NSWCC that only 2000 copies remained making this information sheet the most popular in the history of the NSWCC, to date.

General Practitioners, the massage therapy community and folk with cancer are embracing this information.

Interestingly the minor resistance to the massage information sheet has come from within the massage community and I have been challenged:

"Why are we teaching untrained people to massage people with cancer if we want to up-skill therapists in how to do just that?"

In my experience, receivers of any form of gentle touch are extremely appreciative especially if they are sick and body sore from inactivity. The primary message of massage or **lotioning** for people who are unwell is to 'first do no harm'. Go gently. This is the main message of the document Gayle has written. Would we deny this to anyone who is suffering?

We do need to encourage people to seek professional massage from suitably qualified therapists during treatment for cancer, in recovery from cancer or facing the end of life.

When we are working with anyone who has, or has had, an experience of cancer we are not “working out knots, detoxifying the body or increasing range of movement”(1). What professional massage does offer is a moment when peace and relaxation can bud, a chance to reconnect with the physical self and, medical research shows that pain and anxiety are lowered significantly with professional massage (2).

There is more to professional massage than the act of touching. We offer a tranquil environment, free of toxins, a space that excludes the events of their lives. We offer our clients a knowledge based systematic approach to physical challenges, creating a feeling of trust and safety.

While Gayle was in Australia she conducted two training programs at the Quest for Life Centre in Bundanoon. There were 48 therapists who came from all over Australia to learn from Gayle and we all gained skills and knowledge but best of all we gained confidence.

Gayle and I travelled to Melbourne to present a one-day workshop to the members of AAMT. The ongoing support of Australian Association of Massage Therapists (AAMT) and Australian Traditional Medicine Society by encouraging massage professionals to expand their understanding in many areas of therapeutic touch is reassuring and inspiring.

I spent a whole month with Gayle and when we weren't lecturing we were brainstorming ideas on how to develop the Australian massage community so that therapists can easily become part of the health professional team in general practice clinics and hospitals as they do in many parts of the world.

Gayle assured me that massage training in Australia is excellent and in particular our basic training in understanding the lymphatic system of the body and how to help clients, safely, when nodes are removed or destroyed. Clients are more often than not given self-massage techniques when faced with lymphedema and research shows that receiving professional tactile lymphatic drainage achieves superior results (3).

In May I attended the AAMT annual conference in Adelaide and was delighted to hear international speakers in mind-body medicine offer workshops alongside practical massage workshops. At the conference AAMT launched an inaugural research arm of the association that is the first research body of its kind in Australia.

In July I visited Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney to meet with the Cancer Support Coordinator and we spoke at length about introducing massage into his area of the hospital. This was the first time any medical

facility had invited me to meet with them and this forward thinking young man wanted to know about our 8 year experience of massaging people with cancer at the Quest for Life Centre.

I left this meeting hoping that the funding could be found to establish a massage team employed with all the benefits of nursing employment such as superannuation and sick pay and holiday pay.

By August I was in Ballina teaching 19-massage therapists 'Oncology Massage Module 1' (OMM1). Gayle and I had visited Ballina and Coffs Harbour, sponsored by the NSWCC. Gayle held public lectures and therapists, people with cancer and their family attended the meetings.

The NSWCC has strong cancer support groups in northern NSW and this is an interesting development.

"Dear Eleanor, Petrea and others at Quest for Life,

I am delighted to inform you about the new program Cancer Council NSW is coordinating specifically for women with breast cancer in Shoalhaven City and Tweed Shire. Four of the therapists on the program have been trained through Quest for Life oncology massage programs, either Eleanor's *Massage, Cancer & More* course, or Gayle MacDonald's *Massage for People Living with Cancer* workshop.

Thanks to funding by National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre (NBOCC) through a Polo Ralph Lauren Pink Pony Campaign seeding grant worth \$10,000, Cancer Council has developed a program that gives women with breast cancer the opportunity of enjoying a relaxing massage from a professional therapist for a considerably reduced fee.

Eligible women are able to have three subsidised massages at a cost of only \$20 each. Cancer Council will pay the remaining fee.

As this is a pilot program specifically for women with breast cancer, and because there is limited funding, the program is currently available to women with breast cancer who:

- live in Shoalhaven City or Tweed Shire
- have been diagnosed within the last two years; and
- are in active treatment – either chemotherapy, radiotherapy or Herceptin.

Massages are provided by qualified massage therapists who have experience and/or training working with oncology patients.

Currently, therapists are located in Milton, Swanhaven and Toolijooa in Shoalhaven, and Banora Point, Murwillumbah and Tumbulgum in Tweed Shire.

Women who are interested in being part of the program will need to call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 to register. They will then be referred to one of the massage therapists.

If you are in touch with women living in these two areas who might benefit from a relaxing massage, please encourage them to contact us.

I'd like to thank you also for providing us with the incentive to apply for a Polo Ralph Lauren Pink Pony Campaign grant so that we could get such a program up and running.

If you have any questions about the program, please contact me.

All the best,

**Vivienne O'Callaghan**

**Publications Editor / Program Coordinator**

**Cancer Information**

**& Support Services**

**Cancer Council NSW**

**P: 02 9334 1490**

**F: 02 8302 3520**

This program is lifting the bar and makes my heart sing.

A town in New Zealand has enjoyed this unique service for the past 8 years due to the tireless work of Deborah Yardley, a highly trained lymphedema therapist and an early student of 'Massage Cancer and More'. It is my hope that we can introduce support programs like this around Australia, especially in rural Australia.

In September I was given the privilege of presenting a workshop at the Australasian Integrative Medicine Association Inc (AIMA) conference at Bondi NSW. What a treat to spend 3 days with like minded folk, keen to know about massage as a support for GP's and folk who are facing health challenges.

A small group of 15 doctors chose to come to my presentation (there was stiff competition) and those that came were generous in joining in a little research project.

We asked the doctors to divide into small groups and an experienced oncology massage therapist joined the group to ask them questions about how *they* see massage therapy and how do they imagine massage therapists can support general practice.

I found some of the feedback was challenging.

- some doctors said they had encountered 'a wackiness aspect to some therapists';
- the therapists must have 'no barrow' to push or undermine the doctor;
- they wanted personal experience of the therapist;
- they wanted to know if massage therapists had a 'code of ethics';
- the financial aspects of massage concerned the doctors;
- they need to know who is qualified;
- they said they do not read everything that comes across their desk and they would read the NSWCC information sheet;

- they wondered about 'boundary issues' e.g. male therapists, vulnerable clients and sexual assault issues;
- they suggest complementary massages for doctors at conferences;
- could they refer patients with fibro myalgia, depression, or older patients who have lack of touch.

Let me attempt to answer some of these questions.

The Australian Government Health Training Package, HLT07, governs the massage industry. This health package also governs ambulance and paramedic, anaesthetic technology, nutrition and dietetic, cardiac and dental training to name a few.

There is a code of ethics and given the nature of our work we are trained in confidentiality and medical ethics.

Many therapists offer pensioner and student concessions and many more work as volunteers in hospices and hospitals. I'm sure that if we surveyed the professions more qualified massage therapists would be living below the poverty line than any other trained professional if it weren't for the day job.

Massage training in Australia costs as much as the training of an occupational therapist and is usually undertaken over 4 years with continuing education being compulsory for registration with our professional associations.

A trained massage therapist cannot be given membership of a massage association without professional indemnity and public liability insurance of at least 5 million dollars and they must hold a current first aid and resuscitation certificate.

The American pioneers in the oncology massage arena, Gayle MacDonald and her cohorts, have developed the Society for Oncology Massage (S4OM) and it will hold the first international conference in 2010. My goal is to attend that conference and present a paper on the training program that Australia has developed to support doctors and allied health professionals to deliver the highest standards of health care.

Conversations have begun with a major private hospital to introduce massage therapy into a large oncology ward as well as support the development of the massage therapist training program. Oncology Massage Modules 3 and 4 require a hospital to work and train in and I am hoping that we can begin a pilot program in early 2009.

The Royal Adelaide Hospital hosted OMM1 over the last weekend in November and generously supported the program by absorbing the costs of room hire.

The first weekend in December I will be teaching the seventh OMM1 program in the eastern states and I am off to Perth in Western Australia in late February 2009 to facilitate a one day workshop for AAMT members followed by a 2.5 day OMM1 program.

The interest and enthusiasm is exciting. Oncology Massage Module (OMM) 2 is planned for March 2009, OMM3 in April 2009 and OMM4 is waiting for a home.

There is much work to do and I do not get paid for time taken answering phone calls, writing faxes and emails or developing professional articles and teaching programs. The Quest for Life Foundation does pay me for presenting the OMM programs and I can juggle a small handful of clients who put up with my travels.

With the support of the Quest for Life Foundation, AAMT, AIMA and the NSWCC this year had created opportunities that hither too were never imaginable, except by 'wacky' folk like me.

If we can continue to develop respect and understanding between doctors and massage professionals we can have a compassionate future as we support health and wellbeing in our communities.

#### References:

- (1) Massage and cancer: an introduction to the benefits of touch. NSWCC publication.
- (2) Massage Therapy for Symptom Control; Outcome Study at a Major Cancer centre. Barrie R Cassileth and Andrew J Vickers Journal of Pain and Symptom management vol 28 no. 3 September 2004
- (3) Dr Neil Pillar, Adelaide University. Just 'Goggle' Neil Pillar and look for patient's stories.