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Integrative Medicine. Could Massage be the first step.

In November 2004 I attended the first international conference in New York, USA, of the Society of Integrative Oncology (SIO) and noticed with delight that complementary and alternative therapy had become CAM- complementary and alternative medicine.

The conference consisted mainly of presentations of scientific research on herbs using standard laboratory techniques such as western blot gels; acupuncture trials on specific cancers and the debate on how to do 'double blind' acupuncture experiments; and massage for folk with cancer in an out patient setting and as part of the medical treatment offered in oncology wards.

Massage techniques and it's efficacy were of most interest to me as Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, one of only two specialist cancer hospitals in America, had recently completed a 5 year trail, the results of which were published in the esteemed medical journal Cancer. This research is being held as the gold standard in the medical community and certainly shows that massage is very beneficial for folk experiencing cancer.

This November in San Diego, USA, the SIO conference didn't even debate massage for folk with cancer. From my observation it now seems to be an accepted practice and almost every hospital represented at the conference either had a massage unit in full swing or were creating one. A notable exception for me was the only Australia hospital represented. The Australian oncologist was not as yet contemplating developing a massage facility.

For four years now I have been developing a network of specially trained massage and Bowen therapists to work with people living with cancer. There are now 65 qualified therapists in Australia and New Zealand and the Quest for Life Foundation has adopted Massage Cancer and More as a core program at the center beginning in February 2006.

When I began working at the Quest for Life centre (Quest), shortly after the centre opened, I had the privilege of working as the 'second' massage therapist and the only programs we did at this time were those for folk experiencing cancer.

Ray Perich was the senior massage therapist and had been with the team at Quest since the opening and proved to be a fantastic teacher especially since Ray had overcome advanced cancer himself some five years earlier.

It was not long before I too heard participants say "I know that my body needs massage but the therapists I have found tell me that they were taught in massage school **not** to massage people with cancer." This understanding is not in general held by the medical profession, and in my experience doctors and oncology staff encourage folk to use massage for relaxation and stimulate the production of endorphins, 'the feel good neurochemistry of health'.

With Petrea's and Ray's encouragement and wisdom I attained certificate 4 in workplace training and assessment which allowed me to attain teaching accreditation with the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS).

I began advertising the four-day, 31 contact hours, residential course and before long began traveling the east coast of Australia holding courses in major cities and teaching a remarkable group of compassionate and dedicated therapist, most of whom were already working with several clients managing cancer well.

MC&M is for qualified Bowen and massage therapists who have a minimum of 2 years experience. The course teaches both the scientific and therapeutic elements of working with folk facing the challenges of cancer, cancer treatment such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and current research regarding treatments and diagnostic procedures available within the medical model.

MC&M also looks closely at the 4C's, the principles of spontaneous remission, how they work for clients and for the therapist. Advances in the understanding of complementary and alternative therapies are studied as well as insights gained by the unique team at Quest.

On completion of the course therapists become part of the graduate network, which provides ongoing support and, when it fits into their business program, they come to Quest as the 'second' therapist on a cancer program experiencing a team approach to client management.

There is a growing need to extend the existing services to both therapists and clients, and catch up with world best practice. In both America and the United Kingdom, massage is offered in progressive oncology units in both government and private hospitals from the diagnosis of cancer onwards.

I believe that MC&M meets only a small part of the needs within the oncology and massage community.

As we continue with the MC&M training program our hope is to use the teaching program, expertise and industry insights gained over the past four years to spearhead a much bigger program. A team of highly skilled therapists, who already teach in massage schools and work therapeutically with folk experiencing life-changing illnesses, has come together with the view to develop a nationally accredited training program. This new program will teach suitably qualified therapists the skills needed to work alongside hospital staff in providing the highest international standards of massage support in hospitals and private clinics to folk diagnosed with cancer.

Massage in Hospitals (MiH) is an ambitious project and it requires funding to get government accreditation, pay the costs of the project/development team and fund travel for our New Zealand team member.

The folk involved in the development of MiH are leaders in their field within the CAM profession.

Deborah Yardley did MC&M in November 2000 when she flew to Melbourne for the program and has flown over for a week to massage at folk with cancer at Quest six times since.

Deb is a member of NZ Charter of Health Practitioners and has qualifications in massage and Lymphodema management and has been a therapist for 12 years.

Deb became a massage therapist following a vital episode in her life when she almost lost her life to pancreatitis. Deb is a 'tiny wee thing' and must maintain constant vigilance over her diet to maintain her sparkling good health.

As I write Deb is in New York completing her training at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital. Deb has funded three trips to the US as well as the course costs to gain advanced training in hospital based clinical massage for folk challenged with cancer.

Deb runs a busy clinic in New Zealand where her staff offer seated massage in the work place (a first when she introduced this scheme) as well as NZ Cancer Council funded massage and Lymphodema treatment for folk with cancer.

I joined Deb in San Diego where we will attend the second international conference of the Society of Integrated Oncology. Our aim was to gather as much information as possible on how to establish massage therapy centres in hospitals, offering in and out patient services.

Leonie Dale has a Master of Nursing with Merit from Sydney University and completed her massage training in 1990. Since then Leonie has advanced her skills in lymphatic drainage, aromatherapy and Reiki. Leonie is an accredited massage teacher and has worked in a Western Sydney college for several years. Since joining me to do MC&M in Brisbane in 2004 Leonie has offered massage to participants at Quest on several programs. Leonie is currently doing Bowen training, a 12 month course, and as I write is in Bristol, England doing a certificate in 'Working with People with Cancer' (a five day intensive at Bristol Hospital).

Elsebeth Perry is a Sydney trained massage therapist with over 15 years experience and prior to becoming a full time massage therapist Elsebeth was an art teacher. Elsebeth specialises in Lymphatic drainage and was trained by Drs Casley-Smith in Adelaide. She teaches lymphatic drainage massage at Nature Care College in Sydney and runs a busy clinic in Canberra and the Southern Highlands.

Elsebeth has been a student of philosophy since she was a teenager and shared much of her early life in the same school of philosophy as Petrea King.

Elsebeth too is overseas as I put this article together doing Lymphatic Drainage teacher training in America. Elsebeth is the first massage therapist to be 'invited' to do this course; all before her have been medically trained practitioners. Truly a feather in her cap!

And then there is me.

I trained in Medical Technology at St Vincent's Hospital Sydney; Diagnostic Cytology at King Edward Women's Hospital in Perth with Prof Barter, the first professor of cytology in Australia, in the 1970's and went into development neuroscience research at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, ANU in 1984. I started massage school in the mid 1990's, studying Bowen therapy concurrently and started work with the Quest for Life team in 2000.



My heart is in the facilitation work at Quest, especially on the co-ed cancer program, 'Quest for Life' (blokes with cancer and their support folk are especially close to my heart) and the Neuro Recovery Pathways program.

I am passionate about offering massage to everyone who seeks it and teaching massage therapist how to work with systemic diseases, not just cancer. I see CAM fitting into society as a whole and giving Australians the best health service in the world.

I have a clinic in Canberra where I work three days each week as well as seeing folk from neighboring farms at home.

I am 'too busy' and I am hoping that in the near future I can find funding for my work in developing massage training courses, supporting therapist working with folk on the edge of life and writing for professional journals so that our valuable work at Quest can be shared with the wider therapeutic community.

Quest for Life Foundation has given their generous support to the project and are currently working towards a one year, four part (i.e. four one week residential programs offered over a 12 month period with case studies and course work), government accredited course to skill massage and Bowen therapist to work along side medical teams in oncology units and wards bringing Australia in line with world standard, best practice.

More financial support is needed for this work and hospitals need benefactors to sustain viable in- and out-patient massage centers.

This is truly an exciting time in the world of natural therapies and massage, and I believe that with open hearts and minds we can develop health services, CAM, second to none and the envy of most other countries on the world.

Complementary and alternative medicine, integrative oncology is only a beginning.