

Published : Connections January 2008

In November 2006 I attended the Society of Integrative Oncology conference in Boston, USA and met Gayle MacDonald, the author of *Medicine Hands*. I was impressed with the respect she commanded from her peers, likeminded men and women who have toiled to develop massage for people with cancer while in hospital.

Gayle introduced massage into hospitals in America 15 years ago and she has been teaching internationally for over 6 years.

In major oncology units around America massage therapists are salaried employees alongside doctors, nurses and physiotherapists.

Boldly I asked Gayle if she would travel to Australia to teach her course and speak to hospital administrators. To my delight and surprise she agreed to come to Quest for Life, run two programs and meet with interested parties, as needed, over four weeks in early 2008.

In mid 2007 Quest for Life applied for a grant from the NSW Cancer Council (NSWCC) to underwrite Gayle's visit. Generously they granted us a substantial amount of money. We feel that the commitment of the NSWCC to the project highlights the significance of this major event in the oncology and massage communities.

The NSWCC grant has made it possible to run two, three day programs at the Quest for Life centre that will allow 48 therapists to be instructed in massage for people in hospital and who are medically frail.

In addition, Gayle and I will be delivering a one day workshop for the Australian Association of Massage Therapists (AAMT) in Melbourne, an evening lecture to massage teachers in Canberra and surrounding districts, a half day lecture in Sydney organised by the NSW Cancer Council as well as meeting with hospital CEO's and interested medical practitioners in smaller, more intimate gatherings.

It promises to be a busy month for our American guest!

Gayle did ask me if I could teach her to snorkel and I have arranged a couple of 'rest days' at the coast.

The interest that Gayle's visit has generated is remarkable, and understandable in a health system facing serious financial problems as well as staff shortages. In support of the interest shown in Gayle's program, Quest will be conducting follow-on lectures in areas that have limited resources. Tasmania, Western Australia, Far North Queensland and South Australia are all disadvantaged by the cost of travel.



Ulverston in Tasmania and Coffs Harbour in northern NSW are the first to be offered a 2 day workshop called 'Medical Massage'.

The 'Medical Massage' program has been developed out of Gayle's program and my own, Massage Cancer and More program, offering the current science, research and international understandings of the proven benefits of massage for people facing medical challenges. Courses like Medical Massage reflect the changing needs of the community we serve. Accredited Australian massage therapists are highly trained to a government regulated standard and we need to ensure that they continue to maintain high professional standards by providing suitable training from our wealth of experience here at Quest.

There is work to be done in educating doctors, patients and massage therapists and Quest for Life, in conjunction with the NSW Cancer Council, are leading the way.

Can you imagine that when patients are undergoing medical interventions like chemotherapy and radiotherapy they are offered massage on the wards and even when they leave hospital as an out patient?

It is happening around the world and it will happen here, when and how are the questions now.