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## **Article by Eleanor Oyston reprinted from the Quest for Life Newsletter Spring 2003**

### ***Prologue***

*Where I have written 'massage' please read Foot Reflexology and massage.*

*All the scientific principles and anecdotal content of this article apply equally to Bowen, Foot Reflexology and massage.*

*Deep tissue friction and some trigger point modalities are contra-indicated.*

*Therapists working with folk experiencing cancer are required to have a sound understanding of anatomy, physiology and cellular pathology.*

### **Massage and Cancer: Dispelling the Myths**

#### **by Eleanor Oyston**

Safe touch is the right of every human being.

Massage is the medicine of our hands and hearts.

Massage is an ancient art that has ebbed and flowed over the centuries in every culture of planet earth. In my work at the Quest for Life Centre as a massage and Bowen therapist, over the past three years, I have marvelled at the profound, positive effects of appropriate tactile therapy treatments for folk experiencing cancer and other life threatening illnesses.

Within the wider community there is a belief that massage spreads cancer.

Amazingly this is still taught to massage therapists in massage schools around Australia. I imagine that this has more to do with litigation than healing, as there is a lot of good scientific research supporting the appropriateness and benefit of massage for folk experiencing systemic disease.

The misconceptions around massage grew out of the initial scientific understanding of oncogenesis and metastatic spread (the development and spread of cancer within the human body) which rose to public awareness in the late 1950's. We now know that the movement of cancer cells around the body is not a haphazard process. It is in fact a logical and coordinated process. Mechanical force may influence the invasive process but is not the primary cause and is insufficient to bring about metastases on its own. If a cancer cell enters the blood stream it is unlikely to survive the shearing forces of the movement of the blood because cancer cells are fragile and lack many of the cell parts that normal cells have which make them robust. The lymphatic system does not have a pump like the heart to move lymph fluid and it depends on the movement of muscles to stimulate the flow of lymphatic fluid from the body to the lymph nodes. If this process were a factor in the spread of cancer postoperative physiotherapy, drying oneself with a towel or even walking would speed up the spread of cancer.

The metastatic potential of any cell is heavily dependent on genetic factors (any factor which is expressed in the DNA of the nucleus of the cell) that are either inherited or acquired. Inherited genetic factors require a trigger to activate the gene and acquire genetic influences occur over decades (chemical, viral, radiation in many forms, prolonged emotional and physical stress) or from natural error in replication that occur from time to time. If the cancer cell does not have specific cell surface receptors for any given sight around the body it cannot stop, set up a blood supply (angiogenesis) and create a metastatic tumour. Cancer cells move through the body because they have misinformation from malfunctioning genes.

The health enhancing physical and emotional effects of massage are well documented and intuitively folk experiencing cancer know that they will benefit from massage.

Massage can reduce pain by controlling muscle spasm, reducing soft tissue inflammation, increasing mobility of an affected area and stimulate the production of relaxation hormones such 'anandamide'. The BLISS hormone.

It is my experience that when the person living with cancer reduces the total volume of physical pain or discomfort by massage treatment, eg the old RSI or sciatic problem, the pain caused by cancer is reduced.

Body workers should be mindful of the tumour sites because additional force on the tumour may contribute to the internal pressure already taking place due to the rapid, uncontrolled cell growth of the tumour.

The benefits of professional massage are considerable and with this in mind I have developed the first national, ATMS accredited course called 'Massage Cancer and more'. 'Massage Cancer and More' is a course that teaches postgraduate massage professionals how to work with folk experiencing cancer. There are currently 35 graduates in Australia and New Zealand who work with clients and medical advisors to support healing and living well with cancer.

For further information please contact Eleanor Oyston.

#### *Postscript*

*Currently there is only one graduate of Massage Cancer & More (MC&M) who is a specialist foot reflexologist and she has produced wonderful results in her placement as support therapist on the Quest for Life team as well as being invited to come back on team anytime. Several graduates of MC&M have completed over six months tuition in foot reflexology during their remedial massage training and all have a sound understanding of the principles under pinning this most beneficial of tactile therapies. In my work with folk experiencing cancer I would frequently use foot reflexology towards the end of a full body treatment session.*

**References:**

**Water and Bowen Therapy** by Russell Sturgess

**No More Chronic Fatigue** by Bill Giles

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**Fascial Kinetics - A Practitioner's Guide to Common Myofascial Symptoms and their Treatment with Fascial Kinetics** by Russell A. Sturgess.

**Bowen Therapy** (Fascial Kinetics) by Russell Sturgess.

**Quest for Life** by Petrea King

**Medicine Hands** by Gayle MacDonald

**Pathology** by Ivan Damjanov

**Molecules of Emotion** by Candace Pert

**Professor Chris Parish**, John Curtin School of Medical Research

Eleanor Oyston

CT(ASC) Diagnostic Cytotechnologist, Dip Remedial Massage, Fascial Kinetics Therapist (Bowen),

WHO Cert. Tuina/ANMO Beijing, CHINA

Health Counsellor and Presenter.

63 Candy Road BURRA NSW 2620

Ph/Fax: 02 62363008

ABN 73632881654