

The Power of Touch

Providing a peaceful environment for relaxation can be incredibly restorative. *By Pam McMillan*

WHAT IS ONE THING that comes to mind when you hear the word massage? When I think of massage, I think of a serene room with calming music that helps me escape the reality of life. Massage can also help me be still for a moment and not worry about anything.

The power of touch is amazing. The power of touch for oncology patients is particularly important. Recently, I had the opportunity to sit down and talk with Melanie Eggleston, our licensed massage therapist (LMT), who earned her certification in oncology massage, to learn more about oncology massage and the benefits for patients.

A lot of myths surround oncology massage. Many people don't know the difference between a massage and an oncology massage. An oncology massage is a massage that has been adjusted to specifically meet the needs of cancer survivors. It is based on what type of cancer they have, if they are currently in treatment, and if they have any side effects or any specific issues they may be dealing with.

There is evidence that a massage has many benefits, such as reducing nausea, fatigue, pain and stress. It also improves sleep, supports a person's sense of well-being, increases appetite and boosts a healthy body image.


Many patients are concerned if massage is safe for them. Melanie's advice is to make sure your therapist has been trained to work on oncology patients. Unfortunately, a lot of LMTs feel that if someone has a history of cancer, they can just be "more gentle," but that is not always the case, and everyone's idea of gentle is different. Many patients also ask if there is a time they shouldn't get a massage. This is a little controversial, but if you are feeling well enough for it, there is no reason not to.

An oncology massage is adjusted to specifically meet the needs of the cancer survivor and can be helpful wherever you are in your survivorship journey.



Melanie is a big believer in the power of the mind to help healing. She believes that just helping clients to have a moment of peace and relaxation, where they don't have to think about their cancer is incredibly restorative. She also wholeheartedly believes that massage is important, regardless of where a patient is in their survivorship journey.

A client of hers summed it up perfectly when she said, "I don't think I've given myself a chance to just sit and breathe since I was diagnosed five years ago. Thank you for giving me the time to do that."

Everyone deserves the opportunity to take their mind to a healthy place and just relax, especially oncology patients. Massage can be a very powerful tool to help cope with treatment and posttreatment issues. We consider ourselves very lucky to have Melanie as often as we can at our survivorship center. I would highly encourage you to seek out the nearest Melanie in your community. For more information on oncology massage or for assistance in finding a therapist near you, visit the Society for Oncology Massage at www.s4om.org. 

Pam McMillan, a native to the Texas Panhandle is a registered nurse, wife and mother. During her career she has developed a passion for serving those suffering from cancer. Her current role is leading the survivorship program on behalf of the Harrington Cancer and Health Foundation. She continues to serve those individuals and families across the region that are affected by cancer. Follow her on Twitter @pammo10.