Cancer, Massage, and Safety Essentials

How is Oncology Massage Unique?

A Webinar with Tracy Walton, MS, LMT

Part 3 of the Massage in Cancer Care Webinar Series

Background

- Author
- Educator
- Researcher
- Massage Therapist
- Specialist in massage therapy and cancer care
Cancer

- More than 100 different diseases
- Uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells
- Cells invade surrounding tissues
- Can spread to other body parts (metastasis)
- Many signs, symptoms, complications
- Strong medicine, strong side effects

The History of Massage and Cancer

In classic western, Swedish massage:
The History of Massage and Cancer

In the last 20 years, contraindication questioned
Growing literature
Growing availability of massage for people with cancer

↑ trainings in oncology massage

2007: 1st Oncology Massage Healing Summit (OMHS) in Toledo, OH
Formation of Society for Oncology Massage (www.s4om.org)
The 3rd OMHS in 2013 (more info at s4om website)
Forces Driving Growth in Oncology Massage

Aging population
+ Cancer incidence, prevalence
+ Lengthening survivorship
+ ↑ Interest in massage during cancer treatment
+ ↑ Interest in massage in general

= ↑ demand for massage therapy for this population

Working with Medically Complex Clients

• Conduct a layered interview
• Prioritize health information
• Assess health info for massage contraindications
• Consult client’s physician (in some cases)
Cancer and Cancer Treatment can Affect Organ Function

- Liver
- Heart
- Brain
- Lungs
- Kidneys
- And others...

Cancer and Cancer Treatment may Destabilize Tissues

- Soft tissue
- Bone
- Lymphatic

...These changes are often not obvious
...They can be profound
...Some can linger for years, some are lifelong
How is Oncology Massage Unique?

- Multiple diseases, complications, treatments
- Treatment is uniquely strong
- Layered massage intake aimed at treatment effects as well as condition
- Targeted questions
- Management of complex information
- Management of gaps in information

How is Oncology Massage Unique?

- Substantial massage adjustments
- Massage pressure/joint movement adjustments
  - Low platelets from chemotherapy
  - Liver failure with easy bruising/bleeding
  - Bone metastasis
  - Lymphedema/risk
  - Impaired sensation
Oncology Massage Therapists

• May have to take a greater directive approach in the massage plan

• Will consult physician with specific questions

• Not just: “can this person have MD permission to receive massage?”
Two Questions

1. What is it about the cancer itself (or treatment) that contraindicates massage?

2. What is it about massage that is contraindicated?

Question # 1

What is it about cancer that contraindicates massage?
Information to process...

Breast cancer primary, left breast

Recurrence 10/09

Information to process...

Breast cancer primary, left breast

Mild seizures

Elevated blood clot risk

Liver failure

Ascites, leg swelling

Poor sleep

Itching, jaundice

Exercise restrictions? Unknown

Difficulty breathing lying flat

Brain metastasis

Headache

Anxiety

Brain involvement—spine mets
Information to process...

Breast cancer primary, left breast
Lumpectomy 6/06
Recurrence 10/09
Bone involvement—spine mets
Anxiety
Mild seizures
Nausea
Liver failure
Ascites, leg swelling

Information to process...

Breast cancer primary, left breast
Lumpectomy 6/06
Recurrence 10/09
Brain metastasis
Anxiety
Forgetfulness
Liver failure
Ascites, leg swelling
Information to process...

Breast cancer primary, left breast
Lumpectomy 6/06
Recurrence 10/09
Bone involvement—spine mets
Gentle pressure, RUQ and right arm
Adjust position for discomfort—sidelying?
Hand-foot syndrome
Avoid pressure and drag on chapped hands
Forgetfulness
Extra drape
No pressure on lower extremities
Mild seizures
Extra drape
Anxiety
Liver failure
Pain
Lymphedema
Nausea
Fever
Liver failure
Sudden death
Complications
Vomiting
Treatments
Side effects of chemotherapies
Fatigue
Extra drape
Effects of treatments
Pain
Extra drape
Vomiting
Information to process…

Question 1: Sorting Medical Information

Essentials

Treatments

Complications

Effects of Treatments
Generating a massage plan following appropriate contraindications...

Avoid pressure and drag on chapped hands
Gentle pressure, RUQ and right arm
Use care with pressure on feet, also joint movement
Use gentle joint movement if at all
Extra drape
No pressure on lower extremities
Inspect tissues for ulceration before making contact
Adjust position for discomfort—sidelying?

Elements of a Medical Condition: How does it present?

- **Essentials** – signs, symptoms, medical findings
- **Complications** – Additional diseases or effects on tissue/organ functions, usually later in course of primary disease.
- **Medical Treatment** – medications and procedures
- **Effects of Treatment** – side effects, complications, and adverse reactions
Cancer Essentials

Such as
- Signs
- Symptoms
- Tumor site(s)
- Findings on tests
Cancer

Essentials
- Signs
- Symptoms
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Cancer

Complications

Essentials
- Signs
- Symptoms
- Tumor site(s)
- Findings on tests

Such as
- Effects on liver function
- Effects on lung function
- Loss of bone integrity
- Effects on brain function
Cancer

Complications
- Effects on liver function
- Effects on lung function
- Loss of bone integrity
- Effects on brain function

Essentials
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Cancer

Essentials
- Signs,
- Symptoms,
- Tumor site(s)
- Findings on tests

Complications
- Effects on liver function
- Effects on lung function
- Loss of bone integrity
- Effects on brain function

Medical Treatments
- Such as
  - Chemotherapy
  - Surgery
  - Radiation therapy
  - Hormone therapy
  - Biologic therapy
  - "Bone marrow" transplant

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- Chemotherapy
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Effects of Treatments
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Poor Sleep, etc.
Cancer

Essentials
- Signs, 
- Symptoms, 
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Effects of Treatments
- Nausea 
- Fatigue 
- Pain 
- Anxiety 
- Depression 
- Poor Sleep, etc
What is it about the cancer that might contraindicate massage?
What is it about the cancer that might contraindicate massage?

Cancer

Complications
- Effects on liver function
- Effects on lung function
- Loss of bone integrity
- Effects on brain function

Medical Treatments
- Chemotherapy
- Surgery
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Effects of Treatments
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Poor Sleep, etc.

Cancer

Massage
Question # 2

What is it about massage that might be contraindicated?

Sorting out the Elements of Massage

- Contact with skin
- Lubricant (oil, lotion, ingredients, scents)
- Pressure
- Joint Movement (ROM, rocking, stretching, etc.)
- Friction (drag with pressure across tissues)
- Position (prone, supine, head inclined, sidelying, etc.)
- Site of massage
- Draping
- Speed
- Rhythm
- Session length
- Session timing
- Session intent
Elements of Massage

- **Contact** with skin
- **Lubricant** (oil, lotion, ingredients, scents)
- **Pressure**
- **Joint Movement** (ROM, rocking, stretching, etc.)
- **Friction** (drag with pressure across tissues)
- **Position** (prone, supine, head inclined, sidelying, etc.)
- **Site** of massage
Elements of Massage (continued)

- Draping
- Speed
- Rhythm

Elements of Massage (continued)

- Session length
- Session timing
- Session intent
Other Actions We Might Take as Oncology MTs

- **Medical Consultation**
  (Get permission, acknowledgement, or info/input from MD about the client’s health and massage)

- **Medical Referral**
  (Refer client out to MD; something that needs medical attention)

What is it about massage that is contraindicated?

Or, better: **adjusted**?

What are the massage adjustments or guidelines?

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**Elements of Massage To Adjust**
- Contact
- Lubricant
- Pressure
- Joint Movement Friction
- Position
- Site of massage
- Draping
- Speed
- Rhythm
- Session length
- Session timing
- Session intent
- Medical consultation
- Medical referral
The Decision Tree

• Specific about the health picture

• Specific about the massage adjustments

• A visual way to describe the process
The Essentials Box: Tumor Site

- Solid tumors can begin in almost any tissue
- Some tumors are more accessible or superficial than others
Questions about the Tumor Site(s)

- What is the cancer status?
- Where is it in your body?
- Is it isolated to one site?
- Any recent or scheduled diagnostic tests?
  - What for?
  - Findings?
  - How was/is that for you?
The Complications Box: Liver Metastasis

- Most common site of distant cancer spread
- May or may not affect liver function
- If liver function is impaired, liver failure causes
  - Jaundice
  - Easy bruising, bleeding
  - Itching
  - Osteoporosis
  - Portal hypertension
  - Ascites
- Focus here on ascites
Questions about Liver Function

• Has cancer or cancer treatment affected your liver function at all?
  – If so, how does that affect you?
  – Is your doctor concerned about it?
  – Any effects on skin? Breathing? Other functions?

• Do you have any swelling anywhere?
  – Where? What causes the swelling?
The Medical Treatment Box: 
**Chemotherapy**

- Chemotherapy has strong side effects
- Some are short-term, others linger
- Many different side effects, complications
- Focus here on
  - Peripheral neuropathy
  - Nausea
  - ↓ Blood counts
The Effects of Treatment Box: 
Peripheral Neuropathy

- Injury to peripheral nerves
- Often affects sensation in hands and feet
- Numbness, tingling
- Pain, burning
The Effects of Treatment Box: Nausea, Blood Counts

- Chemotherapy often given in cycles
- Dose followed by rest period
- Side effects at certain time points in the cycles
- Focus on nausea
- Focus on blood counts
**Cyclical Effects of Chemotherapy**

- Nausea often most severe **3-5 days** after chemotherapy
- Blood counts often worst levels **halfway** through a cycle
- Effects are cumulative—worsen with subsequent cycles
During nausea, gentle pressure, limit joint movement, slow speeds, even rhythms, thoughtful positioning.
Effects of Chemotherapy on **Blood Counts**

- **Myelosuppression** = suppression of bone marrow activity → low blood cell counts

  **Thrombocytopenia**: low platelets → bruising, bleeding

  **Neutropenia**/leukopenia: low white blood cells → poor immunity

  **Anemia**: low red blood cells → fatigue, intolerance of cold, dizziness
Questions to Ask about Chemotherapy

- Are you still in treatment?
- Describe the cycles.
- How does chemo affect you?
- Any nausea?
- Any effects on sensation in your hands or feet?
- How are your blood counts?
- (Later in survivorship) are there any lingering effects of treatment/chemotherapy?
Breast cancer primary, left breast
Recurrence 10/09

Liver failure
Mild seizures
Poor sleep
Itching, jaundice
Difficulty breathing lying flat
Elevated blood clot risk
Exercise restrictions? Unknown
Bone involvement—spine mets
Brain metastasis
Ascites, leg swelling
Anxiety
Headache

Medial Treatments

Forgetfulness
Fatigue
Brain fog
Low platelets, easy bruising
Hand-foot syndrome
Side effects of seizure meds
Low WBCs—poor immunity
Pain
Lymphedema risk, right upper quadrant
Chemo-induced peripheral neuropathy
Nausea

Complications

Essentials

Lumpectomy 6/06
Sentinel node biopsy 6/06
Seizure meds
Chemotherapy: 6 cycles
Radiation therapy, 5 weeks
Oncology Massage Skills

- Manage volumes of information
- Interview is targeted, layered, repeated
- Assess health information for contraindications
- Awareness of effects of disease
- Account for treatment effects

Oncology Massage Skills

- Substantial massage adjustments
- Educate others about the practice
- Greater directive approach in the massage plan
- Include the physician, with specific questions and requests for input
The Work Doesn’t Stop

• After the interview
• After one client
• After a few clients

Essential Resources for Practicing Safely with People with Cancer and Cancer Histories

Walton, T.  
*Medical Conditions and Massage Therapy: A Decision Tree Approach.*  
Description and link at [www.tracywalton.com](http://www.tracywalton.com).

Collinge, W.  
Essential Resources for Practicing Safely with People with Cancer and Cancer Histories

“Cancer and Massage,” a regular column at Massage Today. At www.massagetoday.com

Walton, T. Cancer & massage therapy: contraindications and cancer treatment. Free download, link at www.tracywalton.com

Essential Resources for Practicing Safely with People with Cancer and Cancer Histories


Curties, D. Massage Therapy & Cancer. Available at www.curties-overzet.com
The Society for Oncology Massage

www.s4om.org

Contact Information

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Additional Questions on Facebook

Facebook.com/DrBenBenjamin

Some questions I *cannot* answer
Some questions I *can* answer

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Massage in Cancer Care

*Other Webinars in this Series*

1. **Cancer, Massage, and the Myth of Metastasis:** *(Pre-recorded)*
   Why Skilled Massage Won’t Spread Cancer
2. **Cancer, Massage, and Symptom Relief:** *(Pre-recorded)*
   What does Research Tell Us about the Benefits of Massage?
3. **Cancer, Massage, and Safety Essentials:**
   How is Oncology Massage Unique?
4. **Cancer, Massage, and Unstable Tissues:**
   Hidden Contraindications
5. **Cancer, Massage, and the Vital Organ Principle**
   More Hidden Contraindications
6. **Cancer, Massage, and Detoxification**
   Does Massage Have a Role, or Not?
References

Walton T. Cancer and Massage Therapy: Contraindications due to Cancer Treatment (Part 2). Massage Therapy Journal Fall 2006 45(3):119-135. Also available as on line course at www.amtamassage.org

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