

Appendix D

Massage Therapy in Hospitals and Other Health Care Settings

Massage therapy practice is a remarkably versatile career. It can be offered in private homes, in franchises, on cruise ships, at resorts, and in airports. It can also be practiced in highly technical medical settings, including acute care hospitals, interdisciplinary clinics, dialysis or chemotherapy outpatient centers, nursing homes, hospice care facilities, and elsewhere.

Working in medical venues is not every massage therapist's calling, but this is an area that has seen rapid growth and the expansion of opportunities for people with appropriate education. And since part of that instruction includes a thorough understanding of pathologies, it is logical to provide some information on massage therapy in hospitals and other health care settings as part of a pathology text.

This appendix alone will not prepare readers to work in medical settings. Just as you can't read about manual lymphatic drainage and then begin practicing it, you can't read about massage therapy in hospitals and then be ready to go out and do it. Instead, this document will provide background information so that interested readers will be well positioned to seek additional education in this topic. This appendix will give you a good head start in this exciting and fulfilling type of massage therapy.

What Is Hospital-Based Massage Therapy?

While the term "hospital-based massage therapy" (HBMT) has been used to refer to any kind of massage done with any person anywhere on a hospital campus (including patients, their family members, caregivers, and hospital staff), we are going to narrow the focus of this piece to address massage therapy specifically for people who are receiving care in some kind of health care facility. This may happen as they await surgery, or in the post-surgery recovery room. It could happen in their hospital room, an outpatient clinic, a rehabilitation facility, a skilled nursing home, or any other facility where a patient is under medical supervision.

In these settings, massage therapists may function as employees, working under doctors' orders in the same way

that other health care providers do. In other situations, massage therapy is offered as a service from volunteers. Some facilities provide massage therapy as an add-on service, paid for out of pocket by the patient or the patient's family.

Regardless of the situation, the patients receiving massage have health challenges that require them to be under some kind of ongoing medical supervision. Massage therapy for such people requires knowledge and skills that go beyond entry-level practice. To be safe and effective in these settings it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the key pathologies and possible complications that clients may live with, along with what conventional health care interventions and medications people use, and how they may impact choices for bodywork. And massage therapists in health care settings need to understand how to communicate with other health care providers, and how to interpret medical notations and charting.

What Is It Good For? Benefits of HBMT

Massage therapy in hospitals and other medical settings is not a new phenomenon. In this country and around the world, providing bedside massage used to be part of standard nursing care. The role of nursing has changed, however, and nurses in most medical settings no longer perform these services. But that doesn't mean the need has gone away, and massage therapy is one of the most popular services that hospitals offer.

Any well-meaning family member or friend can offer soothing touch to someone who is receiving medical treatment, so why is it worthwhile for massage therapists (MTs) to be included in health care settings? It is because well-educated MTs are in a unique position to bring our skills to the care of medically complex patients. We bring expertise in safe and appropriate touch in the context of illness and treatment. We can work in a stressful environment, with people who may be anxious, in pain, and who may be under treatment for serious health challenges—and in the midst of all that, we can create an oasis of supportive calm and peace.

Beyond offering the gift of educated touch, MTs are also in a good position to gather important information from the patient that might otherwise be missed. This could happen with verbal communication that may be freer during the quiet time that massage provides, but it can also be in the form of observations that the MT makes about the patient's emotional or physical state. MTs can track and report signs of skin breakdown, and we can convey to the patient's doctor, nurse, social worker, or other caregivers any other concerns we might have about the patient's well-being.

The research on the benefits of massage therapy in hospitals and other health care settings is consistently positive. A very abbreviated overview of relevant studies shows that this work can help manage pain following thoracic surgery, hasten gastrointestinal recovery after laparoscopy, and help manage swelling and reduce the risk of complications after orthopedic surgery. In hospice settings, massage therapy has been found to reduce the need for medication to manage pain and anxiety. In short, the research suggests that massage therapy can improve the experience of many patients by offering pain relief, reduced anxiety, and human connection during a time when vulnerable people can feel isolated and alone.

What Does It Take? Specific Competencies for HBMT

All massage therapists, no matter where they practice, should know how to deliver safe, effective, evidence-informed massage therapy. But those who work in medical settings with patients who have serious health challenges must develop some skills that go beyond entry-level massage therapy. The Academic Collaborative for Integrative Health (ACIH) is a group of national integrative health and medicine organizations that works to strengthen understanding and cooperation among clinicians and educators from a variety of health care disciplines. The ACIH worked with many practitioners to develop a set of specific competencies for massage therapists who plan to work in hospitals and other health care settings. Here is a condensed version of the ACIH recommendations, to demonstrate the scope of learning that massage therapists must undertake when we enter this specialized area of practice. A link to the full competencies is provided in the resources section of this appendix.

- **Hospital Environment:** Work with patients, family, staff, and individuals of other professions to maintain a climate

of mutual respect, shared values, and safety within a hospital environment.

1. Work with individuals of other professions to maintain a climate of mutual respect and shared values.
 2. Be able to interpret patient charts and document your work.
 3. Have a working knowledge of medical terminology.
 4. Use proper channels of communication.
 5. Be familiar with frequently used medical devices and equipment.
 6. Make evidence-informed decisions.
 7. Communicate one's role clearly to patients, families, and other providers.
 8. Know and practice appropriate infection control protocols.
 9. Maintain appropriate credentials.
 10. Understand and explain informed consent.
- **Massage Protocols:** Demonstrate understanding of massage protocols within a hospital environment.
 1. Know about medical conditions.
 2. Be able to make appropriate accommodations in massage techniques.
 3. Understand indications, contraindications, and precautions.

HBMT REFLECTIONS

I ask about medications because it gives me a hint about what the patient is dealing with. But I find that a lot of my patients are using medications for something other than what you'd expect. So getting information about meds can prompt good follow-up questions—we just can't assume anything from the list of drugs a person uses.

4. Be able to provide massage therapy in the context of hospital equipment.
 5. Recognize one's limitations.
 6. Demonstrate correct body mechanics for the hospital environment.
- **Therapeutic Presence:** Demonstrate therapeutic presence within a hospital environment.
 1. Express oneself clearly and confidently with team members.