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Massage is good medicine

Research Roundup: Massage Beneficial in Oncology Care

Integration of massage therapy into cancer care relieves pain and improves mood in cancer patients and caregivers

Recent studies show massage therapy can reduce pain, stress, nausea, depression, distress, anxiety and fatigue, while improving health related quality of life for cancer patients.

According to the Mayo Clinic, one in three patients undergoing cancer treatment experiences cancer-related pain. Pain may be the result of cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy, radiation or surgery, or a symptom of cancer growth, which can destroy tissue and add pressure on nerves, bones and organs.

A recent meta-analysis of nearly 600 cancer patients found massage therapy significantly reduced pain compared to the conventional standard-of-care alone, and was particularly effective in eradicating surgery-related pain.

Increased Quality of Life

While massage therapy is highly effective in soothing physical ailments, its benefits extend into many other areas.

A 2014 study of patients with acute myelogenous leukemia who received 50 minutes of Swedish massage three times per week for seven weeks, found all participants experienced stress reduction, increased comfort and relaxation, while also tracking health-related quality of life (HQoL) compared to a group of usual standard-of-care patients. The HQoL scales were comprised of five functional scales (physical, role, cognitive, emotional and social) as well as two symptom scales (fatigue and nausea) and the global QoL scale, finding statistically significant increases in quality of life, when controlling for both stress and anxiety.

An additional randomized study found providing therapeutic massage resulted in significant improvement in short-term quality of life for patients near the end of life, with secondary benefits of pain reduction and improved sleep.

“Massage therapy can supply immense physical and psychological relief,” said Dr. Gabriel Lopez, Assistant Professor in the Department of Palliative, Rehabilitation and Integrative Medicine at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. **“As evidenced by the wealth of positive research in the area, massage therapy has the potential to greatly improve quality of life for cancer patients and their caregivers.”**



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