

A Day in the Life of a Hospital Massage Therapist

So many times in a week I have the honor to help a child or an adult having difficulties with something as simple as a bowel movement. I get a call on my cell phone and go to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to meet a resident that has heard there is a massage therapist that can help a baby that hasn't had a bowel movement in three days. Sometimes a parent is present. If the mother is there, I will teach her how she can touch her tiny baby's tummy in a way that is nurturing and healing. This is done in a clock wise motion from the ascending colon to descending colon with very light touch. Inevitably the child will have a bowel movement shortly after the treatment! This is just one example of how massage helps in our modern medicine.

Today four out of eight patients were new to me starting with a young person with a venous malformation. Next I saw an elderly lady who had stage four lung cancer with metastases to the brain, hip, and liver. Another patient with back pain and just wanted a nice massage. At the end of the day I worked with a Hunter's Syndrome child, another child with stage four Hodgkin's lymphoma, and an ex-athlete who had several abdominal surgeries that resulted in significant abdominal pain. All of these patients needed one thing, relief!

As a licensed massage therapist I've had many opportunities working at a major academic medical center that most massage therapists would never have in their lifetime. Working side by side with attending physicians while showing medical residents and students what and how I work with all of these patients is a great experience for all involved. By working with these practitioners we create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect. I have heard many providers tell patients that "Oh, its ok. It's just a massage. It's not going to hurt you". This is not always true. When you have a patient with stage four neuroblastoma and a platelet count of 35,000, you don't refer them to just any massage therapist for myofascial care. You need a therapist that has a depth of knowledge and extensive training in the specific care that your patient needs.

In the state of New Mexico we have over thirty-seven hundred licensed massage therapists. All of these therapists have a minimum of 750 hours of training. Most of the therapists that work in a hospital system have at least 3-6 more years of training. As a profession, we have started developing higher standards so you, the medical provider, can trust that your patient is receiving the best care possible. Out of 33 counties in New Mexico, there are 22 that have a Licensed Massage Therapists (LMT). In many of these counties, the LMT is the only care provider. Obviously we are not the primary care provider, but with extra training we can always refer the patient to the closest medical facility for the proper care.

Hopefully in the next year, the Advanced Manual Therapist will have the ability to bill and be reimbursed by insurance companies in New Mexico. The time has come!