

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC IS PART OF AQTN'S MISSION

By putting forth some contraindications of massage therapy for cancer patients, we hope that this document may help stimulate discussions in massage schools.

CONTRAINDICATIONS OF MASSAGE THERAPY FOR CANCER PATIENTS

General consideration:

- By offering a **light massage** (slightly more than touch), it may contribute in helping the relief of stress, anxiety, pain and fatigue.

Contraindications of massage:

- Not recommended if the patient has a susceptibility to bruising if taking blood thinners
- Not recommended if the patient has metastasized cancer to the bone.
- The actual site of the cancer and the surrounding scar tissue are both to be avoided.
- An open dialogue with the client, to verify if there are any tumor sites before starting a session is essential, so as to avoid performing massage in that area.
- If the cancer has lymph node involvement, no deep pressure is to be applied to the affected quadrant. Also, **no deep pressure** is to be applied to the entire **arm, upper chest, upper back or shoulder region**. Lymphedema symptoms can result from too much pressure.

If the client chooses the option of being undressed, **only non-scented liquid oils**, such as olive oils, **are to be used**. If the client chooses to remain fully clothed, the following three points are to be considered during a general inspection:

- The wounds must be clean and dry before any touch is performed.
- Tissue integrity must be examined to insure that unhealed subcutaneous tissue is not pulled or tugged.
- Scars must be examined for integrity (no stitches left behind, no openings for the entrance of bacteria, no tiny sites of infection or redness).

If the client is undergoing chemotherapy:

- No full-body regular massage on the day of or the day after chemotherapy.
- The massage therapist should not work anywhere near or on the infused arm (if the client does not have a port).
- Avoid the location of the port so as not to compromise the device.
- The massage therapist should ask if the client is experiencing any neuropathy. Peripheral neuropathy is a set of symptoms caused by damage to the nerves that are typically furthest away from the brain and spinal cord.

Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy (CIPN) damages peripheral nerves affecting sensations, motor control as well as bladder and bowel control. These are only some of the many disabling side effects of cancer treatment.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If a massage therapist has any reservations about treating a given cancer patient, a referral to a massage therapist who does have the specialty in treating cancer patients should be provided. If the massage therapist has no experience or training in treating cancer patients – refer the client.

This document is not intended to be authoritative.