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“HOMETOWN PRIDE THAT’S AS GOOD AS GOLD”

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There's the RUB

Massage therapy a growing health field

By STEVEN GRAHAM • *Sentinel and Transcript Newspapers*

Massage — it's not just for relaxation anymore.

A host of businesses throughout Jefferson County are moving beyond the traditional backrub after a hard day offered by spas or massage parlors. Doctors and therapists say massage therapy is a growing field of legitimate health care for a range of medical problems.

“So many diseases and illnesses are caused by stress and massage therapy works to reduce stress,” said Anne Polich, owner of Whole Body Health Center in Lakewood.

She said massage therapists at her center can help patients with chronic pain, acute injuries, sports injuries and muscle problems in people's jaws. Polich said many people resort to massage therapy only after all other medical options are exhausted, but once they get a massage, they realize the benefits.

Polich said even cancer patients can benefit from massage, even if it is not a cure. She said women have been aided by therapeutic massages after chemotherapy treatments.

“One woman said, ‘Everything hurts, this is the only thing that feels good right now,’ Polich said.

Meredith Oakley, who works at Whole Body, said massage therapy also has general health effects, including increasing energy levels and aiding sleeplessness.

She said it is more complicated than simply rubbing an area that is painful. She said hamstrings and gluteus muscles, for example, support the back and can be con-

Polich said her therapists have more experience and more intensive training than most masseuses at spas (and don't bring up massage parlors around Polich). "A therapist has a depth that is completely different," she said. "We get a depth that a normal

person isn't going to get."

Oakley noted that patients grow attached to their massage therapists and may come in for regularly scheduled massages whether or not they are in pain.

"The important part is that you don't have to wait until you're in pain to get a massage," she said.

Dr. Ken Spresser of Indian Tree Chiropractic in Arvada said he refers many of his clients to massage therapists, but recommends those suffering bodily pain visit a chiropractor or general practitioner for a referral before getting massage therapy.

"I don't think it is a replacement for other professions. If your low back pain is due to misalignment, you can have all the massage therapy you want and you will only get 24 hours of relief," he said.

Spresser and Polich both said those with back and neck problems should visit a chiropractor first, but massage therapy can help carpal tunnel, whiplash and lower back injuries, among other problems.

Spresser also recommended a professional referral to be ensured of getting the best service. He said there are 19 massage therapy schools in Colorado, but no official certification program. However, there is national certification, and those looking for a massage therapist should seek background and credentials.

He said improperly trained therapists can do more harm than good, although there is little danger of injury from massage.

For those who want to go from getting massages to giving them,

there is at least one massage school in Jefferson County. As Spresser noted, there is no massage school certification in the state, but the Colorado School of Healing Arts in Lakewood is registered with the American Massage Therapy Association.

The school offers a degree in massage therapy and certificates in massage therapy, oncology massage, neuromuscular massage therapy and sports massage.

The school also offers reflexology, which takes massage therapy to another level, using specifically targeted foot and hand massages to cure a wide variety of ailments.

Marla Swanson of Lakewood, who practices reflexology, said she can cure colds and respiratory infections through the practice. She said each part of the foot is connected to a specific area of the body.

"You have all these reflex areas in your feet, I am helping to activate and stimulate all their body systems," Swanson said. "If somebody has a cold and they come to me, I do an entire treatment on them but I pay particular attention to the respiratory system in their foot."

Swanson said massage therapy and reflexology can help keep prevent medical problems before they arise, then cure them once they have started.

"We're just like little machines and all our little systems, they slow down," Swanson said. "What reflexology tries to do is restore balance to the body. It's like giving your body a jump-start. You help to get everything up and running."

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM A MASSAGE

1. Be as receptive and open to the process as possible.
2. Do not eat just before a massage session.
3. Be on time. If you arrive in a frenzied, rushed state, it will take longer to get to a relaxed state.
4. If you do not want to remove all your clothing, wear clothing that will be comfortable during the massage and that will allow the massage therapist to touch and move the areas of your body you think will need to be worked on.
5. Give the massage therapist accurate health information.
6. Good communication is very important. Before the session, let the massage therapist know what your needs are. During the massage, report any discomfort, whether it is from the massage or due to any problems or distractions. Feel free to give feedback to the massage therapist regarding the massage.
7. Don't be afraid to discuss any apprehensions or concerns. It is important that you be as comfortable as possible during your massage.
8. Let your massage therapist know if you have any preferences regarding music.
9. If your massage therapist encourages you to talk or not talk, it is usually based on whether or not it seems to help let go of tension and getting in touch with oneself.
10. Breathing helps to facilitate relaxation. People often stop or limit their breath when they feel anxious or a sensitive area is massaged. If you realize you are stopping breathing, let yourself breathe.

— Source: The American Massage Therapy Association, www.amtamassage.org