

Massage Magazine
September/October 2005

Comfort Touch: Massage for the Elderly and the Ill

By Mary Kathleen Rose

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mins.; 2005

Throughout your career as a bodyworker you will, inevitably, have clients, friends or family members who require a type of touch that is gentle and soothing. A friend may have surgery, a family member may be at the end of life, or a client may have been diagnosed with cancer. Through many years of massaging people in the hospice setting, Mary Kathleen Rose has developed a technique called Comfort Touch, which would be beneficial in all of these situations.

A teacher and writer, Rose has organized her expertise into a valuable video/DVD. This presentation has broad appeal for professional health-care providers, as well as family caregivers, but the primary audience is touch therapists. It is this last group that will be most familiar with the principles of touch, vocabulary, charting processes and self-care activities presented in the video. "Comfort Touch is not designed to fix or change the person, but to offer comfort while providing deep relaxation and relief from pain," says Rose. This technique, which is performed most often over clothes, appears at times like an extremely gentle, open-handed acupressure treatment. At other times it's as if the therapist is cradling each part of the body.

Rose, who wrote and produced the video, also appears as the narrator. She begins by presenting the six principles of this touch technique: slow, comforting, respectful, into center, broad and encompassing. Rose continues by showing the viewer how these principles can be applied to the person in a seated or supine position. Both touch sequences are simple and could be learned easily by friends, spouses, and even teens and children. Without a doubt, professional touch therapists should leave their massage training knowing a touch sequence such as this one.

The highlight of this production is the home visit the author makes to June, an elderly woman in an assisted-living facility. We see Rose from start to finish as she enters the facility, knocks on the clients door, sets up the room, washes her hands and provides June with a gentle Comfort Touch session.

Comfort Touch: Massage for the Elderly and the Ill comes with a guidebook that mirrors the order of presentation in the video. This 40-page book is a useful resource for those who teach touch for elders or clients with frail health.

Ample attention is paid to self-care at the end of both the video and guidebook. “Take time to do nothing; to sleep, to dream, to daydream, to meditate,” says Rose. I recommend a session of Comfort Touch for your own self-care. A person doesn’t have to be in fragile health to enjoy this effortless, undemanding form of bodywork. It is for everyone.

--Gayle MacDonald has been working with cancer patients since 1994 at Oregon Health and Science University. She is the author of Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer (Findhorn Press, 1999) and Massage for the Hospital Patient and Medically Frail Client (Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2005).