



HOW'S YOUR PAIN MANAGEMENT MENU?

BY RUTHIE PIPER HARDEE AND JENI SPRING

RELAX, **ASHIATSU** HAS GOT YOUR **BACK!**

WE HAVE BEEN HAVING AN ON-going love affair with resorts and spas since the late 1980s. As consumers back in those days, we would lay on those hot marble slabs in the perfectly balanced eucalyptus steam rooms under the drenched cucumber eye cover towels. During these times, we would often wonder to ourselves, "How can I get paid to do this on a regular basis?" Was there some spa junkie payroll somewhere out

there that we weren't aware of? And if so, how could we get in on the action?

Fast forward two decades. Now, as licensed spa professionals, our question is, "How can I get this staff up and operational in a short amount of time, be safe and teach them the tools they need to be taken seriously in today's spa market with regards to pain management? And in addition to all this ... can I still deliver tangible results?"

It is the duty of continuing education providers to educate spa directors and lead therapists on how to offer several approaches to treating and managing

pain for their guests. They must be committed to ensuring that the training they receive will have an impact on the guest experience, as well as the employee's longevity for a greater spa community.

How can this be accomplished when you barely have time to change linens and adjust the table in between clients, let alone focus on a personal intake form? The answer doesn't come without challenges, but it is the responsibility of the licensed professional to take this training seriously. That is by far the biggest reward. In other words, don't offer a service on the menu if you are not able to deliver and be responsible with your guests' safety.

We've come a long way since spas were viewed as "fat farms." Just as important as creating the environment that helps a guest make a direct emotional connection to a healthier lifestyle, one should address pain management options with thought and care.

Medical spas, intake forms, products and treatments have also come a long way. While it's important to know some personal medical details about your client so you don't accidentally mix up ingredients that will give them an allergic reaction, you also need to know about their pain and the treatment you are providing to treat it.

Spas offer all kinds of alternative pain healing treatments, from bathing in a particular spring for the powers of the mineral water to offering a bonanza of massage techniques and deep tissue tools. Pain management services are alive and well in spas around the world, and they generate big bucks. The more knowledge and training spa professionals have on the treatment options they're delivering within the relationship to pain management, the more ownership they have in helping that guest break through the pain cycle.

Chronic pain affects millions of Americans. The most requested service in today's spa market is deep tissue massage, which can either be tailored for relaxation or pain management. So it makes practical sense for spas to offer a comprehensive massage treatment for a wide

range of chronic pain conditions, including the following:

- Spinal pain, including lower back, neck and thoracic pain
- Failed surgery for back pain
- Sciatica
- Myofascial pain
- Neuropathic pain
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Joint pain

This barefoot bar therapy is recognized as a specific deep tissue technique, and has shown remarkable results for persons suffering from:

- Chronic pain
- Limited mobility
- Recovery from injuries (whiplash, falls, sports, etc.)
- Repetitive strain injury, such as carpal tunnel syndrome
- Postural problems
- Osteoarthritis pain
- Fibromyalgia
- Muscle tension or spasm

Ashiatsu Deepfeet Bar Therapy is a perfect service for spa guests who suffer from long term chronic pain and want to avoid surgery, or are taking medications that are not helping. Having staff who understand how to explain Ashiatsu barefoot compression to guests is imperative as well.

Eric Dzwonkowski, D.C. of Journey Health Center in Denver, CO endorses Ashiatsu Bar Therapy as a natural alternative treatment for many of the conditions mentioned above. "The Ashiatsu style and technique focuses on realigning deeper layers of muscles and connective tissue," he says. "It is especially helpful for chronically tense and contracted areas such as stiff necks, low back tight-

ness and sore shoulders. While pain is a subjective and highly individualized experience, I feel that Ashiatsu is a great source that treats the whole mind, body connection and we use it on a daily basis here in the office."

Two common areas where massage-seeking spa-goers experience pain or discomfort are the middle and lower regions of the back. Many times these clients experience nagging, chronic pain in the general location or specific "knots" felt within the tissue. Often they schedule a deep tissue massage, and the pressure requested or required may be more than a massage therapist can easily provide. DeepFeet offers techniques helping massage therapists achieve consistent, broad pressure at the level of depth needed to address the underlying issue, while still providing a transformative mind-body experience for clients visiting a spa or resort.

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Once the early waves of relaxation wash over the client, a deeper level of therapeutic bodywork will naturally begin. The superficial fascia moves under the therapist's arch. Layers of dehydrated and chronic scar tissue begin to melt under the ball of the therapist's foot, allowing for the client's deeper hypertonic and spasmodic muscles to stretch and lengthen under their soft heel. All this takes place within the first five to ten minutes of the massage!

Lower back pain can stem from many issues—postural, past injury, travel, etc. Without a doctor's referral or recurring sessions with this client, it may be hard for a resort or spa therapist to fully grasp the entire situation. Creating a comprehensive plan on the spot that will provide effective pain relief within one single massage can be difficult. However, with the series of strokes in

barefoot bar therapy, the pain can easily start to diminish just minutes into the first session, with holistic benefits lasting throughout the week—beyond what a traditional deep tissue massage typically provides. Ashiatsu is known as the "deepest, most luxurious massage on the planet," yet it also works at a profound, therapeutic level that helps clients reduce and eliminate pain.

Our "Make Nice" series of strokes at Ashiatsu addresses thick connective tissues of the lumbodorsal fascia. Working this area of the low back and hips starts a chain reaction of relaxation throughout the entire body. Gliding barefoot compressions to the sacrum and surrounding areas gently mobilize the web of deep and superficial membranes—increasing range of motion and tissue rejuvenation, naturally assisting a passive realignment of the sacroiliac joints and pubic symphysis. Prolonged com-

pressions will heat, stretch and energize connective tissues while also activating the parasympathetic nervous system as the body gently attunes itself. The parasympathetic part of the nervous system slows heart rate and normalizes blood pressure—it is responsible for telling the muscles to relax, improving one's digestion and absorption, boosting immunity and promoting good sleep.

As we travel up past the sacrum and into the lumbar region, our famous "Morticia's Rack" stroke elongates the spine and opens the intervertebral space, increasing the disc's height and centrally aligning its position. Irritation on the spinal nerves may be relieved with a variety of broad, gentle directional forces applied by a well-trained foot. Traction builds toward the head with a rolling decompression of joint capsules. Pressure

continues



- According to Cherkin, Eisenberg, et. al. in the April 2001 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, massage is effective for providing long-lasting relief for patients suffering from chronic low back pain.
- The October 2002 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health* reported research showing that muscle-specific massage therapy is effective for reducing the incidence of chronic tension headaches.
- A pilot study conducted by Gregory P. Fontana, M.D. at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA in 2000 found that massage reduces pain and muscle spasms in patients who have multiple incisions. When surveyed, 95 percent of patients felt that massage therapy was a crucial part of their hospital experience, and that their need for medications dropped on the days they received a massage.

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saturates the client's body, creating slight articulations of flexion and extension. With each carefully applied stroke, subtle gravity flows through the therapist's foot down into the client's tissue with a safe and steady comfortable weight. This helps release chronic postural holding patterns, increases your client's awareness of space, reduces nagging pain and feels like a fabulous massage steamroller has lengthened them out!

In the case of mid back pain, the forward rounding of the Thoracic spine and shoulders can create an aching, sometimes sharp or radiating sensation between the shoulder blades, near a pivoting point in the upper back. Then, 15 to 20 minutes into the session, we begin to apply the single-sided "Warrior" strokes, which, with the help of the lateral plantar edge of the massage therapist's foot, address the intrinsic muscles of the spine that live within the lamina groove to help alleviate chronic mid or upper back soreness. Muscles such as rotatores, multifidi and spinalis each act similar to shoelaces, weaving through all aspects of every vertebrae, affecting range of motion while maintaining alignment on the spinal column.

Offering Ashiatsu recipients access to wellness education, onsite amenities such as steam, sauna or even physical fitness activities like yoga can inspire a new beginning to their own healing process and better pain management.

For clients who love deep pressure massage and are looking for fast relief from pain, an Ashiatsu specialist can easily create a single session that effectively assists in managing chronic or acute pain. Ashiatsu provides the depth many massage consumers crave, and focuses on injury treatment. Plus, it saves the body of the hard working massage therapist, so that they can continue to provide effective bodywork year after year! ■

Ruthie Piper Hardee is the founder of Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy. She created the first nationally approved course study for a western barefoot effleurage technique using bars on the ceiling. Hardee pioneered the gravity assisted barefoot-bar massage treatments used in the spa and massage industry today. For more information, visit www.deepfeet.com, email e-info@deepfeet.com or call 303.300.2511.

Jeni Spring is an authorized educator in the state of Texas and a certified instructor for Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy. Her training center is located in San Antonio, TX. For more information, visit www.HealingSole.com or contact Spring at Jeni@HealingSole.com or 210.623.0026.