

# Effect of Massage Therapy for Postsurgical Mastectomy Recipients

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This quality improvement pilot study evaluated the effect of massage therapy on pain, anxiety, and overall well-being in women who received mastectomies at a busy hospital practice. Participants reported a significant reduction in pain, stress, and muscle tension, as well as an increase in relaxation. Oncology nurses should consider the feasibility of massage therapy as a valuable nonpharmacologic pain management strategy.

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Excluding cancers of the skin, breast cancer is the most common malignancy among women, accounting for almost one in three cancers diagnosed in American women (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2011). In 2011, an estimated 230,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer and 57,650 additional cases of in situ breast cancer were diagnosed among women (ACS, 2011). The decline in breast cancer mortality has been attributed to improvements in breast cancer treatment and early detection.

Most women with breast cancer will undergo some type of surgery such as biopsy, lumpectomy, mastectomy (simple, total, or modified), and possible reconstruction. Patients often also require other treatments such as radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and/or hormone therapy (ACS, 2011). About 40% of all patients diagnosed with invasive breast cancer

ultimately undergo a mastectomy, and an estimated 85,000–90,000 mastectomies are performed annually in the United States (Katipamula et al., 2009).

Postoperative pain, anxiety, fatigue, muscle tension, lymphedema, and nausea are among the challenges facing patients following mastectomy. Many Americans are using integrative medicine such as massage therapy to complement traditional health care (Barnes, Bloom, & Nahin, 2008). Massage therapy is used specifically to target common postoperative side effects such as pain, anxiety, fatigue, and muscle tension. In addition, massage therapy accounts for 44% of all complementary and alternative medicine services offered to patients in hospital settings (Health Forum, 2011).

A 2005 survey completed by the Mayo Clinic Breast Clinic in Rochester, MN,

examined interest in massage therapy and other forms of integrative medicine among patients with breast disease. Surveys were mailed to 63 patients who had breast abnormalities or a recent diagnosis of breast cancer and had received massage therapy from February to April 2005. Thirty-five patients responded (56% response rate); all felt that massage therapy was effective in helping to reduce stress, and 34 believed it was very or somewhat effective in reducing muscle tension. In addition, 29 (83%) reported that massage therapy was effective in reducing fatigue, creating a general feeling of wellness, and improving sleep quality and their ability to think clearly. Although the study was small, the findings demonstrated that massage therapy may help patients with breast disease reduce stress and feel better overall (Pruthi, Degnim, Bauer, DePompolo, & Nayar, 2009). As a result, the current pilot study aimed to evaluate (a) the effect of incorporating massage therapy into a busy breast surgical hospital practice and (b) the feasibility of a fee-for-service model.

## Methods

This project was conducted from March 1 to May 31, 2010. Integrative massage therapy was offered to mastectomy recipients from three surgical services on postoperative day 1 by a certified massage therapist with a physical therapy background. Each massage session was performed by the same therapist for consistency. Prior to initiation of the pilot, the massage therapist spent a day observing breast surgery in the operating room to gain a better understanding of the extent