



Incorporating seated massage into your practice

by Paul Lewis

Is the massage chair only beneficial to achieve relaxation and not rehabilitation? To answer this question, perhaps we need to ask ourselves if there are any additional uses for this modality other than at the corporate office.

In-chair/seated massage training is not typically a component of undergraduate massage programs. Most massage therapists (MTs) would not gather specific seated/in-chair massage training unless they enrolled in a continuing education workshop prior to, or following, graduation. Some schools will spend a brief amount of time showing students how to massage a client who is sitting in a regular chair or, if lucky, students may learn a few basic techniques appropriate for corporate chair massage events.

Why learn in-chair massage?

Many people enter into the massage therapy profession with enthusiasm and vigour, determined to help make a difference in other people's lives. They learn various methods and techniques for addressing client issues, an endeavor that they soon realize is an ongoing process. Furthermore, as time passes, therapists' careers may be cut short, as aches and pains start to present themselves into our bodies. If we are not conscious of body mechanics and proper application of learned techniques, one might start to experience the same positional pains that clients come to see you about. You may find it hard to keep up with all of the "new" techniques for treating various

client issues. They say there is more than one way to peel an apple and it is up to the therapist to determine which tool minimizes their expenditure with maximum returns.

Learning new treatment methods, or taking workshops that contain transferable skills allowing you to translate knowledge into other treatment areas, is most beneficial in the long run. If you learn how to perform a safe and effective seated/in-chair therapeutic massage on a client, and if you can view the chair as more than just for relaxation, then the chair will open up and show you its potential and alternative positional benefits.

How is this modality viewed?

Personally, I don't see in-chair work as being separate from massage but as an extension of it, allowing therapists to diversify and, based on their learned skills, to reach out to potential, previously unattainable, markets.

When I look at the massage chair, I see a multi-purpose item that can, because of its light weight and portability, be used on its own for off-site/corporate work, or alternatively, at a clinic in combination with the table for therapeutic/medical treatments. Being able to effectively use the chair is an added skill to one's "tool box" augmenting one's marketability. The ability to physically

set up the chair, adjust it for client and therapist comfort, and knowing the intricacies or small adjustments to be able to reach the desired areas of treatment will not only complement your current practice but also help to enrich your skills and, ultimately, your bottom line.

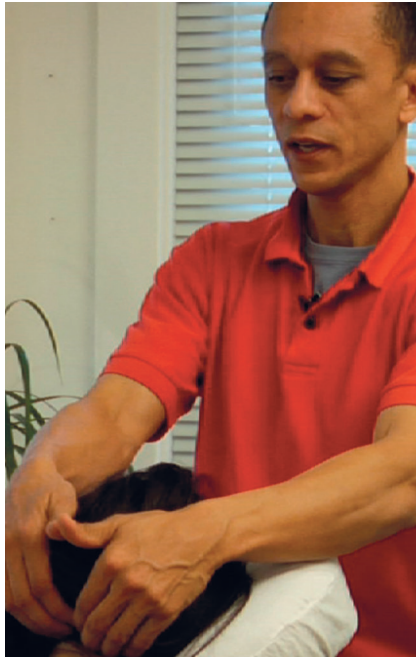
Take for example the pregnant client – with in-chair massage, you can now treat her in a face-down position. This is not only a better alternative to being in prone

position on the table, but a preference of many women who have been on their side for many months. As another example, if you seat the client in the opposite direction in the chair, you are able to work on anterior structures for clients experiencing temporomandibular joint symptoms(TMJ), rotator cuff issues... and the list goes on.

Rules and boundaries

It should be noted, that, when using a chair for treatment, whether formal or informal setting, rules of conduct still apply with regard to client- therapist relationship, setting boundaries, obtaining health information and obtaining consent to treat. As a massage therapist, I believe that the massage profession necessitates touch and, whether or not a chair or table is being used, the same rules and protocols should be followed. For example, with table treatment, we perform an assessment,treatment,post-assessment and suggest self-care exercises. Whether the treatment that is agreed upon is relaxing or rehabilitative in nature, an assessment for chair massage, however brief, should be performed.

Assessment is vital to confirming your hypothesis, supporting what areas you plan on treating and to providing a rationale for the choice of modalities and treatment techniques that you will employ. When a client presents with an issue or an injury, it is necessary to look not only at the area of referred pain, but also at related structures that may indirectly contribute to their symptoms or underlying cause of injury.



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As a health care professional one must also keep in mind the client-therapist relationship. Whether you treat over the clothing or not, boundaries are set right from the beginning – ensuring these boundaries are in place sets the stage for empowering the client and building/enhancing the client-therapist relationship. In my clinic, I incorporate both chair and table modalities into some of my treatments. And depending on the issue, the client may be clothed or covered with the ability to apply lotion on the skin. On occasion, it will be necessary to use both in one treatment because the client may not be able to be in a prone position on the table but able to be prone in a chair.

Finally, I strongly believe in what I was taught regarding communicating with patients -that two way communication through information/consent exchange is the best way to keep the client abreast of all actions planned, present and future. At the forefront of every treatment should be the interest of the client regardless of the treatment location, length of time you have known the client and regardless of the number of times you have seen them to date. My experience as a male therapist includes working on patients with various issues and treating sensitive areas such as in pregnancy, mastectomy, hip/knee replacements, temporomandibular joint dysfunction, Gillian Barre Syndrome, sacroiliac joint dysfunction, abdominal/constipation issues etc. I have found that clear client-therapist communication is the best policy. Prior to the patient/client receiving any hands on treatment, I find it best to make sure they understand and agree with the proposed treatment plan. I inform the patient of what of the treatment procedures are, areas to be treated, whether or not they may experience discomfort, how they are to be covered etc., right down to the type of lotion I plan on using if at all. This helps to ensure that there is no misunderstanding and helps to build open communications between the client and therapist.

Just as we learned about body mechanics and rules for treatment techniques on the table, in-chair massage requires technical training and mastery, as well as a commitment to apply rules of patient-centered care and to perform a safe and effective therapeutic massage. This is true for all in-chair/seated massage clients whether they receive the treatment for relaxation or rehabilitative reasons.



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