

“An Oncology Massage Curriculum in Scotland”

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In 2007 I was diagnosed and treated for breast cancer, aged 48. When I had completed treatment I chose massage as part of my recovery. Having read the book “Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer”¹ by Gayle MacDonald, founding member of the Peregrine Institute of Oncology Massage in the USA, I looked for a therapist who had trained with her, and how wonderful that massage was! I floated out of Caroline’s therapy room and it made me appreciate the huge emotional and psychological benefits massage could offer.

Establishing a Multi-Disciplinary Team

It was as a result of this experience that the idea grew of creating a multi-disciplinary team to develop our own Oncology Massage Curriculum in Scotland. We started to establish our team in October 2009, and today it comprises people diagnosed with cancer, medical and clinical staff, researchers, massage schools and universities, massage therapists, NHS policy adviser, hospices and cancer care centres. Our inaugural meeting took place on the 20th of April, hosted by Napier University in Edinburgh.



Our Vision: Collaborating to provide oncology massage therapy across Scotland

Our curriculum will form a post-diploma course and comprise a number of levels, from basic through to advanced, so that massage therapists can choose what level they want to aspire to, perhaps influenced by the environment in which they typically work. We will apply for charitable status this year under the name the *Iris Cancer Partnership (ICaP)*.

My Appeal to You as Massage Therapists

Today, a third of the population will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime and according to Cancer Research UK, “Up to a third of people with cancer will use complementary therapy at some time during their illness.” Coupled with the knowledge that cancer is primarily a disease of ageing and that the baby boomer generation (the age group born between 1946 and 1964) is entering the typical age group in which we develop cancer, it is increasingly unlikely that you will be able to avoid someone diagnosed with cancer wanting to book a therapy with you.

On behalf of others like me who find massage such a wonderfully nurturing and supportive experience during and after treatment, through diagnosis, prognosis, or at end of life, I would ask you when you are planning your continuing professional development to please consider Oncology Massage as a candidate. You can keep abreast of our activities and progress at www.irismassageventure.co.uk which is our temporary website until our new cancer charity is established. We now publish a quarterly newsletter on the site, and current training courses are listed. Please feel free to contact us any time. We are all volunteers so forgive us if it takes a little while to get back to you.

Quote from Jo di Francesco, regarding a short impromptu presentation on Oncology Massage in Scotland, delivered to around 70 therapists at the Scottish Massage Therapist Organisation (SMTO) Annual Conference in March 2010.

Jo is a offshore medic and is a patient representative on our team; she says,

“As you spoke to the group I could not help tears falling (good tears, tears of joy).”

It’s early days yet but we plan that the last quarter of 2010 will see our first big step change in bringing an integrated training programme to Scotland, introducing the basic level of our curriculum.

Joyce Gillespie, Breast Cancer Patient

Acknowledgements and References

¹ “Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer” by Gayle MacDonald ISBN: 978-1-84409-090-7