

Holistic MassageSM

by William Barry

Holistic Massage is both an assessment methodology and a framework for generating a specific massage plan tailored to the constitution of a client. With Holistic Assessment the specific nature and qualities of the massage can be determined, *a priori*, for any individual whether a sedentary worker, an obese person, a bodybuilder, a child, an elderly person or any other. The massage plan chosen is created specifically for the client's condition at that moment in his life.

In the absence of Holistic methods, the best scenario is the experienced therapist who senses which modalities and which strokes work for each client. With appropriate massage techniques the client can be brought into better balance. However, without a methodology the therapist is left entirely to his perceptions and experience level at the moment.

The more common scenario is a therapist who works in only one modality or who exercises the same patterns with everybody, regardless of their physical condition and needs. For both the student of massage and the skilled professional, a methodology that includes assessment of energy status and the appropriate determination of modalities and/or strokes can significantly enhance results.

The method of assessment of Holistic Massage adopts the Eight Principle Patterns from Traditional Chinese Medicine. The therapist evaluates four energy parameters along a continuum of polar opposites. These parameters are hot/cold, deficient/excess, internal/external and, ultimately, yin/yang.

Prior to massage these parameters can be easily identified by the therapist from an assessment sheet and follow up questions. For example, it is easy to determine if the client tends to cold limbs or is red-faced; whether they are tired or hyperactive and irritable; whether their ailments are deep inside the body and chronic or mostly on the surface as in musculoskeletal problems. Then the therapist can determine predominance of yin or yang by the following description: yin is cold, deficient and internal, while yang is hot, excess and external.

Since each of these qualities is given a numerical value in Holistic Massage, it is easy to determine how cold or hot, deficient or excess, internal or external, and yin or yang a person is. On a scale of zero to ten, absolute yin is valued at zero, the middle range is five, and absolute yang is ten.

Most people fall into the middle range, as in the standard Bell Curve, yet the massage treatment is vastly different for a person who measures mostly yin, than from one who is mostly yang.

With holistic status determined, the therapist is ready to cre-

ate his massage plan. The therapist will tonify, or build up, the client who tends to be more yin. He will sedate those who lean towards the yang disposition, and will use even methods for the client who is right down the middle.

In applying Holistic Methods to Circulatory Massage (Swedish massage) for a tonifying treatment the therapist would select among strokes such as friction, percussion (tapotement), Swedish gymnastics, vibration, deep petrissage, and appropriate acupressure. For sedating effects, effleurage, light touching, light friction and appropriate acupressure strokes could be employed.

The therapist will modify the strokes to bring out the tonifying or sedating qualities by varying the pressure, rhythm, duration, overall direction, speed, sequencing, and intent. Modifying factors are the key ingredient for imparting the full impact of Holistic Massage to the client. Modifying factors may even be used to give a tonifying stroke predominantly sedating qualities or vice versa.

The science of Holistic Massage becomes the art of massage based on the skill of the therapist in the selection and refinement of strokes and modifying factors. Since the client receives a massage based on his actual needs, the body is brought into improved homeostatic balance. From there self-regeneration is possible. Holistic massage can be readily adopted to conventional techniques and soon becomes essential for high quality therapy. Holistic Massage may also be applied to other major fields of body work just as illustrated in Swedish Massage.

This system has been developed at the Phoenix School of Holistic Health in Houston, Texas. They have demonstrated remarkable success with over 3000 client hours to date. Holistic Massage is relatively new as body therapies go. To reach its fullest scope, especially in regard to systems other than Swedish Therapy, requires the creative input and healing currents of many talented therapists. ■

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