



**AMMA THERAPEUTIC MASSAGE –
A WHOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH**
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Case History: L.P. is a 72 year old male, diagnosed with acute leukemia in 2000. Unable to have chemotherapy, he was given a prognosis of 3 months to live. He came to our office in desperation, seeking some alternative form of treatment. Our treatment plan initially consisted of weekly Amma treatments, major dietary changes, herbal therapy and supplementation. Recently L.P. went for a check-up and was told that he has now entered the annals of one of the longest living survivors with his disease. He continues with his regimen of weekly Amma treatments and has added acupuncture to his treatment program. He looks and feels wonderful.

This true story is only one of many amazing case histories from our office files. Clearly there is more to massage than just relaxation. It is no longer a secret that Americans are seeking alternative and complementary forms of health care, natural, non-invasive approaches to the treatment and prevention of disease. Safe and effective alternatives are what many people are seeking, whether it be for arthritic pain, PMS or menopause, for hypertension, weight control, smoking, diabetes, etc. Scientifically based medicine is not the sole or necessarily the best form of medicine in all cases. Certainly, conventional medicine is very valuable for emergency situations and acute conditions; but it is clearly less successful in preventative medicine or chronic disease. Studies show that more and more physicians are comfortable with recommending some form of complementary or alternative therapy. Six years ago only 15 medical schools had some course in complementary medicine. Today, over 75 schools include complementary medicine as part of their curriculum. And the number is growing.

The major principle of wholistic health is that to treat any pain, dysfunction or illness properly, the problem must be understood in the context of the

patient's "whole" mindbody condition. Wholistic medicine does not exclude allopathic medicine but rather views it as part of a greater system of healing that includes acupuncture, amma therapeutic massage-a specialized form of Oriental bodywork, herbalism, chiropractic, and biofeedback, among other treatments. In wholistic medicine, the mind and the body are seen as one integrated whole, the "mind/body complex," where a physical problem is not isolated to a particular organ or place within the body, but rather affects the whole body including the mind and the emotions. And, conversely, the emotions can affect the physical body because the body and the mind and the emotions are intertwined and often defy reductionist examination.

Oriental medicine, one of the major systems of wholistic medicine, recognizes the existence of an energy system that pervades the body with a complexity even beyond the elaborate circuitry of the circulatory or nervous systems. It is this energy system that literally gives life to our material structure or body. The energy system is not recognized in western medicine because it is not a distinct material part of the body, and this is the greatest divergence from the wholistic, especially the Oriental healing arts.

From the Oriental perspective there are many factors that can disrupt the flow of energy in the mind/body and thus result in disease. Some of these factors are constitutional, that is, the genetic inheritance that we receive from our parents may interfere with energy. Our emotions which reflect and are bound into the neuromuscular system, improper diet and nutrition, improper or lack of exercise, musculoskeletal misalignment, environmental toxins, microorganisms and medications are some of the other obstacles which interrupt proper energy flow. Treatment is aimed at restoring the harmonious balance of energy which in turn affects the organs and the rest of the physical structure.

There are basically five limbs or branches of Traditional Chinese Medicine – acupuncture, bodywork, herbalism, diet and nutrition, and exercise. Amma is an ancient form of bodywork that rooted in the same fundamental medical principles as the other branches, focusing on the balance and movement of energy within the body. The techniques of amma help to remove blockages and free the flow of energy in the mind/body--thereby restoring, promoting and maintaining optimum health. While the acupuncturist inserts needles into the energy pathways to stimulate and move the energy, and the herbalist administers herbal formulas to achieve the same effect, the amma therapist relies primarily on the sensitivity and strength of the hands to manipulate the life force or "Qi".

A typical amma session usually lasts from 45 minutes to one hour and often includes nutrition, vitamin, supplement, herbal and exercise recommendations. Patients wear a gown or loose clothing and are treated on a massage table. When a patient comes for an amma treatment, he or she is evaluated individually. Each patient has their own "pattern of disharmony" which is identified through a complex Oriental diagnostic procedure called the Four Traditional Methods, including various techniques of reading the pulse from the radial artery at the wrist and interpreting the shape, color and coating of the tongue. These techniques offer a wealth of information about the patient's organs, imbalances in their energy flow, the state of their life force as well as their overall constitutional health. Honoring an integrative approach, the amma practitioner will often also utilize available information such as blood test results, X-rays, MRI's, EKG's etc. and will research the various side effects of medications on the patient.

The therapist skillfully gathers all the information through the review of data provided by the patient, tongue and pulse diagnosis, observation of the patient's signs and symptoms, listening to the patient's complaints, and palpating the body. Since the amma therapist lives in a world of palpation, the hands and the fingers are essential data gathering devices. When palpating, specific attention is paid to the location of any areas of sensitivity or pain, as well as pain related to any particular position or movement. Attention is also given to structural deviations, spasms, any palpable masses, skin temperature and skin changes. The mission of the therapist's assessment is to create a mind/body portrait that includes structural, emotional and energetic imbalances. Treatment is to restore balance in the mind/body.

Combined with wholistic philosophy and principles, all of the information is assessed into a traditional Oriental diagnosis. Once a complete, individualized assessment is made, a treatment plan can be formulated. The therapist comes to a conclusion about what is to be treated first and what can be treated later, that is, what is of primary importance in treatment and what is of secondary importance. A realistic expectation and objectives in the context of a short term versus a long term plan helps set goals which are within reach of the patient.

The treatment plan includes the manipulation of specific points and areas of treatment, the use of herbals liniments, recommendations for specific dietary plans, detoxification methods, and the use of appropriate herbal, vitamin and supplementary preparations. An important part of the amma process is patient education, regarding appropriate recommendations regarding diet, vitamins, supplements, herbs and exercises directed toward

optimum health. Amma also stresses patient responsibility and cooperation in following through with the recommendations of the amma therapist. This is an essential component of a successful therapy. The basic techniques in combination with the major energy balancing points can provide a powerful and profound release of stress and tension, removing energetic blockages due to stagnation of Qi and Blood, and thereby moving the body toward balancing and health.

Amma is utilized to treat a wide range of conditions including traumas from sprains and strains, arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, circulatory disease, cancers, autoimmune diseases such as scleroderma, chronic fatigue syndrome, neuromuscular diseases, asthma and bronchitis. Amma treatments have also proven exceptionally beneficial for infants and children in treating acute and chronic ear infections, upper respiratory tract infections, juvenile arthritis and diabetes, teething, headaches, hyperactivity, coughs and colds. In addition, it is possible through preventive amma treatments, to build the immune system and promote a healthy and longer life.

Students who wish to learn this profound art and how to incorporate it into their practices can begin by taking our introductory workshop.