

Note from this editor: We are saddened to announce that Irene Smith has passed from this life into the next. Irene Smith was scheduled to be a speaker for the cancelled 2020 California Chapter Massage & Bodywork Educational Conference. Few people can leave a legacy that is remembered in the minds of others. Irene has left a legacy that will remain in the hearts of those she literally touched at the end of life and to those she taught how to touch and listen to those at the end of life to those served.

Below is a reprint of the article published in the California Currents, Winter 2019-2020 Issue.

Touching Moments: Massage in Hospice Care

Presented by Irene Smith

After thirty-six years of providing massage in hospice care and teaching healthcare providers and massage practitioners sensitive touch skills as an invaluable component to end of life care, I am thrilled to present Touch Awareness as the foundational skill for Hospice Massage in combination with client positioning and *Everflowing* lotion technique in an eight-hour class entitled Touching Moments March 14th [2020] in Santa Ana California during the AMTA California conference.



Through lecture, Meditation discussion, personal experience in group exercises, and hands-on practice, students in Touching Moments will have the opportunity to discover a more expansive conscious relationship with our sense of touch and define the impact of both tactile and non-tactile touch as it pertains to providing massage for hospice clients.

Through integrating awareness of the multi-dimensional relationship of touch, at the core of massage therapy, with education regarding our sense of touch, massage practitioners will have the conscious ability to cultivate deeper levels of trust with clients experiencing various states of physical and emotional vulnerability.

Dying persons are vulnerable. They have lost physical defenses due to the loss of muscle mass and physical stamina. They have relinquished social defenses in the need to receive intimate care, and many will give up emotional defenses as they let go of their image in the world, their family, their bodily functions and finally the ability to breathe. At the same time Clients are most often living inside an overloaded nervous system and being cared for in environments overloaded with stimulus. Assisted Living communities,

hospitals, nursing homes and even in-patient hospice facilities provide around the clock care for multiple residents which lends to around the clock activity.

The body is subjected to numerous medications and medications for side effects from medications; friends feeling helpless because they do not know what to do and a health care team that many times has no sensitivity skills in their training to support a patient's various states of anxiety and or trauma.

This depth of vulnerability and possible overwhelm experienced by a dying person, the client, deserves a safe environment or container in which the client feels that his or her vulnerability is witnessed, validated and honored and anxiety from overwhelm has a non-judgmental space to express itself.

As practitioners if we do not understand the impact that our human presence has on a client's nervous system and how awareness of such can completely change the dynamic of a client's experience then our session starts in the middle.

With Touch Awareness as a foundation, we have the opportunity and knowledge to cultivate a trusting, validating and restful environment. The dual blessing is that this is a practice of staying grounded, centered and in the current moment for the practitioner. What we put out is mirrored back to us.

Touch awareness skills and a deeper understanding of our sense of touch provide the tempo and attitude that continues to be cultivated through positioning the client. Rather than viewing positioning of a client as preparation for the hands-on session, with a deepened sense of Touch Awareness the practitioner may now recognize the positioning of each prop as a complete offering. Each piece of the offering now becomes a valuable component in the cultivation of ease and comfort. Each prop is honored as an extension of the client's body to be treated with the same dignity and respect as an arm or leg. There is no moment any more sacred than another moment. This attitude and tempo of movement creates a deeply relaxing space of care and nurturing.

"I didn't realize when I learned Touch Awareness that it would be priceless. Sitting tonight with someone I had spent time with every week for over a year, and seeing her immobile and actively dying, I realize that the small easy things that can be done to make the person more comfortable were not being done. I found unsupported gaps, and gently rolled up small towels and placed them to support various body parts. I then taught her kids how to do this method with awareness. As I said my goodbye, her hard breathing, that she had the whole time, went silent. Even though someone may seem unresponsive, their soul is always listening."

The protocols most prevalent in this approach are,

- Begin entry with a **pause**. Be still. Listen to the silence and **breathe**.
- **Observe** your environment; your client; Have **eye contact** to express clearly that you are right there in that moment.

- Feel your feet on the earth. **Ground** and center.
- **Breathe**. This is a good time to **integrate** the experience you find yourself in
- **Rest** always rest. This means for the practitioner to find a place of **self-comfort**.
- **Breathe** with **exhale** included. Your breath gives permission for relaxation for all those present. If you are holding your breath, then there is no room for receptivity.
- **State exactly where you are going to touch**. Speak audibly and clearly. Your voice establishes a tone and rhythm that becomes a vital component to the overall rhythm that your client's nervous system will mirror back to you.
- **Observe** your client's body animation to assess comfort or lack of comfort before following through with the touch. This is the pause. An environment of trust is created before the hands make contact.
You touch with your eyes, breath, voice, body movement and when the trust has been established you may make physical contact.
- **Approach the body slowly**, honoring the space around the body. The energy fields surrounding the physical body are scientifically the most sensitive of the bodies. A fast approach may elicit a startle response.
- **Move slowly and gently**, your rhythm will be mirrored through your client's body. Slow dictates one activity at a time. Multi-tasking causes diffused focus and confusion as to exact intention. Multi-tasking may also cause physical agitation.
- Always feel your feet grounded with the earth.
- **Always breathe. Always rest.**

The protocols listed above create an attitude of honoring what is rather than suggesting there is something to fix, something to change or something to heal. In honoring what is we acknowledge that there is nothing left unfinished. Your moment-to-moment experience is already perfect.

Please check out my website (www.everfloweing.com) for a full spectrum of educational resources, classes and webinars



Bio: Irene began her journey as a massage therapist in 1974, certified from the Los Angeles School of Massage. She is a member of the Hospice Volunteer Association, the San Francisco Bay Area End of Life Coalition and serves as a member of the Advisory Council for the Elisabeth Kubler Ross Foundation.

In 2001, Irene founded and currently directs Everflowing, (www.everflowing.org) an educational outreach program dedicated to teaching mindful touching, as an integral component to end of life care. Having introduced massage into hospice care on the West coast in 1982, Irene has worked with hundreds of persons in hospital, home, hospice, and skilled nursing environments.

As Director of the internationally acclaimed non-profit organization Service Through Touch (1982-1999), Irene established massage projects for persons with HIV/AIDS worldwide.

A respected author and educator, Irene teaches health care providers, and body workers tactile support skills for caring for ill and dying persons and creates resource materials utilized by institutions worldwide.

Her written contributions include Providing Massage in Hospice Care, Touch Awareness® In Caregiving, The Emotional Impact Of Working With The Dying, chapter four in Psychoimmunity and the Healing Process by Jason Serinus and chapter nine in Aids: The Ultimate Challenge by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross MD.

Irene's work has been honored by the somatic and health care communities as an outstanding contribution to community wellbeing. Irene's awards for community service include For Those Who Care by KRON TV; Eight Who Matter awarded by the Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals; two Cable Car awards for providing massage volunteers to hospitals for persons with Aids; the first National AIDS Memorial Grove's inductee for AIDS service, and 2014 World Massage Festival lifetime achievement award recipient.

Irene continues to teach Providing Massage in Hospice Care in various locations in the US, teach Touch Awareness for several San Francisco Bay Area hospice organizations, and consults in the development and implementation of hospice massage programs.

As a West Coast assistant for over 10 years to her teacher, the late pioneering thanatologist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, MD, Irene brings remarkable depth, wisdom, and therapeutic presence to her work.