Aromatherapy Awareness in Massage Therapy

Maureen Leung-Connolly & Jo Smith

Introduction

History has shown that aromatherapy and essential oils were used in the ancient practice of herbalism forming the background to today's current practices. Essential oils today are utilised in: the manufacturing process of Pharmaceuticals, nursing and geriatric facilities, health professional practices such as dentists' and homeopathic practices, home made products, and in the application of oils and waxes in sports and therapeutic massage. Due to their medicinal constituents, essential oils have a wide variety of conditions in which they can be used such as: osteoarthritis, back pain, sprains and tendinitis. The New Zealand Register of Holistic Aromatherapists (NZROHA), established in 1993, is the professional association for aromatherapists in New Zealand, with many international alliances. The aim of this pilot study was to investigate massage therapists' knowledge and views on aromatherapy, and in particular explore the idea of integrating aromatherapy into their massage therapy practice.

Methodology

This project was a qualitative research study using semi structured interviews. Inclusion criteria required participants to practice massage therapy in Southland, hold a massage degree and be fluent in spoken and written English. The interviews lasted 60 minutes and were transcribed non-verbatim. Categories were developed during the coding process and analysed. The complete guide to aromatherapy was used. Results were from interviews from a sample size of 6.

Results

Knowledge of essential oils

- Some knowledge of healing properties & use
- Minimal knowledge

"Not a whole lot" (Lele).

"I don't use essential oils much in my own practice, you hear wee bits here and there" (Anesha).

Possible Aromatherapy use in massage therapy

- Rehabilitation
- Relaxation

"I could certainly see use in injury rehabilitation ... to aid with the healing of soft tissue ... possibly relaxation" (Lele).

Benefits of essential oil use in massage therapy

- Healing time
- Portability
- Induces relaxation
- Sell as a product line

"The healing side of essential oils ... if it's going to heal them quicker for the next game they would use it; inducing relaxation" (Lele).

"Give them some basic physiology without overwhelming them quicker for the next game they would use it; inducing relaxation" (Lela).

Barriers to essential oils use in massage therapy

- Cost of oils
- Client safety
- Time consuming
- Preconceived views
- Limited education on aromatherapy

"It would be the cost that would be my biggest thing, for good oils are expensive" (Lela).

"It could also be very dangerous ... Need to be cautious" (Lisa).

"Mixing them which are a time factor and cost" (Taylar).

"The therapist not being educated on essential oils in clinical practice" (Amelia).

"I am working with males in a sporting environment, and I think they would be a bit funny about essential oil use" (Bela).

Next steps

- More education required

"Education is the key for it needs more recognition ... definitely give therapists' more skills to offer" (Anesha).

"First of all it would be good just to get an understanding of just what it does; and then if they were educated at the right level ... education is a starting point" (Bela).

Discussion

Overall, therapists had very little aromatherapy knowledge

Education would provide benefits for clients and widen scope practice

Participants queried which came first: therapists' education or the clients?

There is a need to gauge client interest before seeking further education

Client interest would determine the choice to undertake aromatherapy education and the outlay of products and equipment for Aromatherapy use

Financial feasibility was one of the biggest issues for most participants

Time and current commitments were seen as a barrier to commit to more study

More research is required on both public perception on massage therapists perception of the role of aromatherapy in the treatment of healing and wellbeing

Conclusion

This small pilot study has provided insight into the possibilities and challenges for integrating aromatherapy into massage therapists practice. There was a general consensus that further education was the key to increasing awareness, knowledge and practical application of aromatherapy. However, while some were prepared for further education, most participants were satisfied with the current status of their practice.

References: