



## **The use of Facial & Foot Reflexology in palliative care.**

By Lone Sorensen

***Face & Foot Reflexology is a way to take care of pain, nausea, fatigue, emotional and spiritual support for patients and family in palliative care.***

Reflexology is complementary therapies used alongside conventional medical treatments prescribed by medical doctor. The therapy can help people with cancer to feel better and may improve quality of life. They may also help to cope better with symptoms caused by cancer.

When patients are facing a serious illness, they need support and relief from pain. Patients need relief from other symptoms, such as fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, shortness of breath and relief from stress, too. Patients need to better understand condition and choices for care. They need to improve ability to tolerate medical treatments. And, they need to be able to carry on with everyday life.

Reflexology is a very effective and natural method, a tool to help patients and family in this situation.

Palliative care is to help patients too feel better. Reflexology is a positive touch. The treatment not only trigger anti-stress hormone but also triggers the endocrine system to produce morphine substances that relieve pain.

Since a treatment last 60 minutes it is also possible to talk with patients about emotions and feelings during the treatment.

Hospice care is meant specifically for those approaching the last stages of life, while palliative care is appropriate for any stage of a serious illness. The goal of palliative care is to relieve the pain, symptoms and stress of serious illness – whatever the prognosis. It is appropriate for people of any age and at any point in an illness. It can be delivered along with treatments that are meant to cure.

Palliative care is typically provided by a team that includes palliative care as doctors, nurses and social workers and in some hospitals around the world, professionals in complementary therapy as reflexologies are a part of the service too. The team normally works in partnership with a primary doctor.

Palliative care is the medical specialty focused on improving overall quality of life for patients and families facing serious illness. Emphasis is placed on intensive communication, pain and symptom management and coordination of care.

Patients have a range of diseases and respond differently to treatment options. A key benefit of palliative care is that it looks at the patient as a whole in order to meet the individual needs of each person and family.

Palliative care benefits both patients and their families. Along with symptom management, communication, therapy and support for the family are the key. The team helps patients and families make medical decisions and choose treatments and therapy that are in line with their goals.

Family can be offered therapy too.

Palliative care may be provided at any time during a person's illness, even from the time of diagnosis. And, it can take place at the same time as curative treatment.

Hospice always provides palliative care. However, hospice is focused on terminally ill patients—people who no longer seek treatments to cure them.

The main objective is;

To offer close and clear communication

Expert management of pain and other symptoms

Help navigating the healthcare system

Guidance with difficult and complex treatment choices

To support the patient and family emotionally and spiritually.

Several studies have looked at using reflexology to help with cancer symptoms such as pain, sickness and anxiety.

A study in 2007 looked into partners giving reflexology treatment to people with metastatic cancer and a control group. 86 patients took part. In one group patients' partners were taught how to give reflexology by a qualified reflexologist. The partners then gave the patients a 30 minute reflexology session. In the other group the partners just read to the patients for 30 minutes. In the reflexology group the patients had significantly reduced pain and less anxiety.

Many health professionals are very supportive of people with cancer using reflexology. They can see that the therapies help people to cope better with the cancer and its treatment. Many therapies have not been scientifically tested in the same way as conventional treatments. Some research trials have been

carried out to see how well reflexology work for people with cancer. Some trials are still in progress. But more studies are needed to help develop knowledge about the best way to use reflexology.

The reflexology study is a randomized controlled trial looking at the effects of reflexology on quality of life. It wants to find out how reflexology affects mood, adjustment to cancer, physical functioning coping, and the immune system for women with early breast cancer. The study has closed and we are waiting for the results.

### **International complementary and alternative therapy research**

In the USA the National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) has a database of complementary and alternative therapy clinical trials. It includes trials for people with different types of cancer that aim to help to control the side effects of cancer and its treatments. Although these are not UK trials, we have included a link to NCCAM because the trials may be of interest to some people seeking information from around the world. Also in the USA, the Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCCAM) has information about recent trials into CAMs.

You can find out about some European CAM research on the European Information Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine website.

The International Institute of Facial and Foot reflexology counts with experience treating children with leukemia, women with breast cancer and patients in last stages of life.

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