



Hospital Based Postnatal Massage Therapy

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Many postnatal massage traditions were lost when births moved from home to hospital. For perspective, in 1900, over 95 percent of U.S. births occurred at home, where the postnatal care rituals of immigrants from around the world were woven into new mothers' lives. It is time to bring the benefits of postnatal massage back to our new mothers in the hospital setting, where the majority of U.S. mothers give birth. In my experience, even one 30-minute massage in the hospital following birth has the potential to have a significant, positive impact on the mother's body, mind and spirit, which can translate positively into her care of her new baby.

In hospital based postnatal massage, mothers often request attention to relieving their muscle tension and pelvic pain lingering from pregnancy, labor and birth. This tension and pain is found most commonly in their jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, back, pelvis and legs. Trigger points in the abdominal muscles, iliopsoas, quadratus lumborum, spinal erectors, and other pelvic movers require sensitivity with release techniques that promote deep relaxation. Postnatal massage techniques that address pain emanating from sacroiliac, sacrotuberous, sacrospinous ligaments and the pubic symphysis provide additional comfort, especially after vaginal birth, with an attunement to the hormone relaxin's effects on the new mother's joints' connective tissue.

Secondarily, mothers also tend to request focus on relieving the strains of early newborn care on stretched, weak or imbalanced joints and muscles, especially in the neck and pectoral girdle. In the U.S., approximately 30 percent of women give birth by Cesarean. These mother often request post-surgical pain reduction and edema relief from



administered IV fluids during their births. Swollen hands can make caring for a newborn uncomfortable and difficult, while swollen feet can make walking quite painful.

There are several hospital-based postnatal massage program models of success to celebrate. One hospital partnered with a local massage school that offered a postnatal massage elective in their core curriculum. Student interns who completed this elective, as well as requisite health screening and orientation, offered postnatal massage to patients in their hospital beds under the supervision of an on-site instructor supervisor. There was no cost to patients, and the hospital and massage school shared the cost of instructor supervision. Postnatal massage services were limited to the days that student interns were scheduled.

Another hospital hired massage therapists as independent contractors who completed requisite postnatal massage therapy training, medical screening and hospital orientation. Patients received postnatal massage in their hospital beds and paid out of pocket at the time of the massage.

A third hospital surveyed previous patients, asking them to rate the value of several amenities. including postnatal massage, take-home dinner, diaper bag or baby book scrapbooking pages. Participants said they would prefer services that bring value to their lives and would prefer to not have material gifts. They hired massage therapists as employees who completed requisite postnatal massage therapy training, medical screening and hospital orientation, and the postnatal massage program is in its fifth successful year.

A fourth hospital pioneered postnatal massage for its patients by replacing plastic lawn storks, a steak dinner and package of disposable baby wipes with a complimentary 30-minute postnatal massage for every patient available 365 days every year. In the 1998 three-month pilot program, pre- and post-massage patient surveys showed 100



percent patient satisfaction with their experience, with 70 percent of new mothers having never received a professional massage before. In the two decades of this successful program, approximately 15,000 new mothers were served. Today, the postnatal massage therapy program has evolved to a collaboration with hospital OB-GYNs who offer their patients a three-pack of both prenatal and postpartum massages, as well as a full menu of services including classes for expectant couples, infant massage and pelvic floor wellness.

For hospitals that provide outpatient massage therapy services, mothers can continue to enjoy postnatal massages after their hospital discharge. Simple additions and flexibility make it easy for mother and baby to continue enjoying the experience together. In fact, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists' (ACOG) May 2018 recommendations for Optimizing Postpartum Care including more postpartum contact for new mothers with the physicians - within the first 3 weeks postpartum followed up with ongoing care as needed, concluding with a comprehensive postpartum visit no later than 12 weeks with a full assessment of physical, social, and psychological well-being, Physicians have an exquisite opportunity to integrate postnatal massage by a trained postnatal massage therapist in these office visits which can improve visit attendance as well as improve their patients' postpartum care experience. Semi-reclined or side lying positions where baby can be held or breastfeed in mother's arms during the massage, a nearby baby bassinet or baby swing, extra seating for family or friends who may accompany the mother and provide baby care while mom receives her massage nearby, and a diaper-changing area make it a welcoming, family friendly experience.

The most compelling reason for hospitals to consider including postnatal massage in their maternity care is their patients' satisfaction. Also, when birthing women have a positive care experience in a hospital, it



positively influences their future health care decisions when choosing a hospital for themselves or their family members. Each year, hospitals budget for promotional amenities for their obstetric patients as a marketing strategy. Because women of childbearing age make most of the healthcare decisions for their families, innovative hospitals are looking for evidence-based, value-added amenities that attract new patients and keep their current patients returning. By offering postnatal massage, hospitals are also meeting Joint Commission (JCAHO) required standards for offering their patients non-pharmacological pain relief options. Postpartum massage has potential benefits to enhance healing, decrease perception of pain and decrease the amount of pain medication used by mothers during their postpartum hospitalization. This not only enhances more effective patient pain management, it also improves patient clinical outcomes. Lastly, integrating postnatal massage into the hospital's care follows patient-centered healthcare trends in offering more evidence-based wellness and preventive therapies as an option for patients.

by Michele Kolakowski, excerpts from "Massage Therapy Provides Proven Benefits to New Mothers" Massage Magazine, August 2018

