

Massage therapy eases many ailments

MEGAN MARTIN
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The benefits of massotherapy have been touted for many years. Once seen as a luxury expense, massotherapy treatments are quickly becoming a regular part of people's health-care routine.

The benefits for athletes and people with jobs that involve physical labour are obvious. But evidence is quickly building that there are positive side effects associated with regular massotherapy sessions for just about everyone — and seniors are no exception.

"The benefits for seniors can be huge," said Sylvie Bédard, president of the Fédération québécoise des massothérapeutes (FQM). "Depending on age and condition, massage therapy can be a wonderful experience for seniors physically, mentally and emotionally."

This is particularly relevant in Quebec, where the senior population is growing in numbers. According to the Quebec government, the province had nearly 1.3 million seniors over the age of 65 in 2011, representing 16 per cent of the population. That figure is expected to increase to 26 per cent by 2031.

Baby boomers are among the seniors most receptive to massage therapy, Bédard added.

"They're an age group with a lot of interest in it," she said. "They're very conscious of their health and have really taken to massotherapy; they seek consultations and very often end up receiving regular sessions."

It's a good thing, because the FQM estimates that 150,000 people in Quebec live in chronic pain.

"Massage is wonderful for so many ailments," Bédard said. "It's helpful for chronic pain, hypertension, stiffness, tension, and improving circulation and mobility."

While baby boomers have largely embraced massotherapy, it is also very beneficial for older seniors, particularly those in residences and long-term care facilities.

Massage therapist Cécile-Diane Houle has been volunteering in senior residences for the last 20 years.

"Physically, it helps older seniors so much and has subsidiary effects like



COURTESY OF THE FÉDÉRATION QUÉBÉCOISE DES MASSOTHÉRAPEUTES

Massage therapist and FQM member Marie-Chantale Gaba performs a mobilization manoeuvre to improve the mobility of her client's shoulder girdle.

improved sleep, and stress reduction," Houle said. "It's soothing for the whole body."

It's also very valuable for seniors' overall well-being and quality of life, she added.

"Seniors can feel isolated, and if they don't have a lot of family, their interactions can often be limited. Having a regular visit by a massotherapist provides company and something for them to look forward to, and the physical contact is very comforting."

Massage therapists adapt their sessions to the individual needs of each senior. In fact, courses have recently become available for massotherapists

looking to specialize in senior care.

"While they're getting a massage, seniors tend to forget their pain, medications, medical appointments and anything else stressing them for a while," Bédard said. "It's an escape for them and it can be very rewarding for the massotherapist as well."

Massage therapy is also very beneficial for seniors undergoing treatments for various forms of cancer. The FQM has a foundation specifically geared toward delivering massage services to cancer patients — and particularly seniors.

"It helps to reduce pain and nausea, optimize immune response and improve sleep," Bédard said. "It's also a

form of physical touching that doesn't involve doctors or nurses, which can provide a nice break for those undergoing treatments."

One reason some seniors may avoid massages is because they don't feel comfortable being partially naked in front of a stranger. But not to worry, Bédard said: "There are a lot of massage options that don't involve removing any clothing."

"There are different types of massages, such as chair massage, that are done fully clothed. And, of course, when we massage the arms, hands, feet and head, people aren't required to remove any clothing at all."

For more information and to locate a certified massage therapist near you, visit www.fqm.qc.ca or call 514-597-0505.

IN A NUTSHELL:

- Massage therapy can be very beneficial for people undergoing cancer treatments. This is particularly relevant to seniors as, according to the Canadian Cancer Society, cancer is primarily a disease that affects Canadians age 50 and older.

- By choosing a certified massage therapist, you can be confident that they have received quality training in a school accredited by the FQM, Quebec's only training accreditation body in massage therapy.

- Massage is more than a means of relaxation. Massage helps reduce stress, prevent diseases and improve overall health.

- Massage offers many benefits for the structure and posture of the body, the body's general functions, the sensory and psychomotor functions, and psychological and emotional well-being.

- There are 11 different types of massage recognized by the FQM including Swedish, Thai-yoga, and Momentum massage. Each one has a different approach.

Source: FQM