

# Working with Oncology Patients

An avenue to growth

by Nora Brunner

**A**t a recent Associated Skin Care Professionals (ASCP) BizFit webinar, expert esthetician Janet McCormick noted newly available training through an organization called Touch for Cancer (TFC), based in Vancouver, British Columbia, that trains spa workers in caring for the special needs of cancer patients. The interest shown by estheticians in this idea during the webinar was very strong. While most schools advise against working on cancer clients altogether, TFC promotes it with the caution that significant training is needed to perform the work.

The needs of these patients are unique, as the ravages of chemotherapy and radiation have a serious impact on hair, nails, skin, and the immune system. TFC does not focus strictly on skin cancer as you might expect, but prepares estheticians to work on clients with all forms of cancer.

For ASCP members who are dually licensed in esthetics and massage therapy, this topic could be doubly compelling as the training includes oncology massage. The good news is massage, once erroneously thought to spread cancer throughout the body, can be a source of great comfort to these patients.

## Program May Expand

A small TFC class was held earlier this year in Scottsdale, Arizona, consisting of three days of intensive training for some local spa staff and a few spa workers who traveled from other parts of the country. One was Ruth Lowery, who journeyed from Dallas to become a certified oncology esthetician.

"These people want to feel beautiful again," Lowery says of the patients the class worked on as part of their training. "They're so grateful." TFC founder Morag Currin has been operating the program for about 18 months. While most of the training is held in Phoenix (there are courses scheduled for July and October), Currin hopes to expand the sessions to other parts of the United States. The three-day training costs \$495. She is considering

adding optional units for a fourth day on how to work with nails and/or skin cancer. She hopes to incorporate information on how estheticians can market their services to hospitals. Some trainees serve cancer patients in their spas; others go directly to work in the oncology units of hospitals.

## Look Good...Feel Better

If that's more of a commitment than you want, you can still help. There's a volunteer program helping cancer patients called Look Good...Feel Better (LGFB), sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the Personal Care Products Council Foundation, and the National Cosmetology Association. The effort was started because a physician had a depressed cancer patient who got a fresh attitude after he arranged for her to receive a makeover. The program offers a two-hour training session for volunteers and the focus is more on cosmetics and makeup than skin care as such.

The program offers patient education in groups or individual sessions, self-help materials, and free makeup kits used in classes.

Since its inception in 1989, LGFB has served 550,000 women, and the cosmetics industry has donated more than \$113 million in product and financial support to the cause. LGFB operates in every state, plus numerous foreign countries. They have added services for Spanish-speaking patients, teens, and an informational piece for men. **SD**

## RESOURCES

Look Good...Feel Better—[www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org](http://www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org)

Touch for Cancer—[www.touchforcanceronline.com](http://www.touchforcanceronline.com)

Gayle MacDonald, *Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer*, (Findhorn Press, 2007)—[www.medicinehands.com](http://www.medicinehands.com)

Morag Currin, *Oncology Esthetics: A Practitioner's Guide*, (Allured Business Media, 2009)—[www.allured.stores.yahoo.net/new](http://www.allured.stores.yahoo.net/new)