Chapter 3
Tools of the Trade and the Massage Environment

Susan G. Salvo

Introduction

• Success as a massage therapist depends on two factors:
  – Education and skills training
  – High-quality tools and their proper use
• Massage room/massage studio—where massage is actually performed
• Massage office/paper office—where paperwork and scheduling are done

Introduction

• Décor and furnishing of the massage room will depend on the type of massage
  – Clinical massage—might resemble a doctor’s office
  – Sports and rehabilitative massage—might have sports theme and reference information
  – Stress-reduction massage—might have warm colors and scents; subdued lighting for relaxed atmosphere

Massage Tables

• Stationary—stays in massage room
• Portable—can be moved to client location
  – Account for 90–98% of purchases
  – Cost $200–$600
• Table should be purchased from a reputable manufacturer

Massage Table Features

Selecting a Table Manufacturer

• Benefits of purchasing table from a reputable manufacturer
  – They provide great customer service
  – Most offer trial period
  – Best warranties
  – Table will have higher resale value
Massage Table Features

- **Width**
  - Most are between 28 and 31 inches wide
  - Depends primarily on height of therapist
    - If table is too wide, therapist cannot reach across table due to loss of leverage.
    - Wide portable tables are more difficult to carry when folded.
  - Large clients may require side extensions to feel secure

- **Height**
  - Adjustable—between 22 and 34 inches
  - Depends on height of therapist, type of massage, and girth of client
    - If table is too high, therapist is unable to utilize leverage and lower body strength to apply massage strokes. This may result in achy arms and shoulders.

- **Length**
  - Most are 72 to 73 inches long
  - Face rests add length to table
  - Bolsters reduce the length of table needed

- **Frames**
  - Wood—heavier
  - Aluminum—lighter, quicker leg adjustments
  - Carbon fiber—slightly lighter, but may flex and wobble

- **Padding**
  - Density—light, medium, or high
  - Loft—from 1.5 inches (firm) to 3 inches (plush)
    - Memory is the ability of the foam to return to its original height after its surface has been disturbed
  - Newer padding such as aerocell and layering system last much longer than single padding

- **Fabric**
  - Vinyl is most common choice
  - Vinyl substitute such as ultra leather available
Vinyl Fabric Care
- Daily cleaning
  - Wipe daily with soft, lint-free towel and clean with gentle cleanser
  - Disinfect only when vinyl comes in contact with unidentifiable substances or body fluids
- Avoid extreme temperature change
- Avoid oil, isopropyl alcohol, and chlorine bleach
- Use carrying case when transporting

Massage Table Accessories
- Face rest
  - Allows client to keep head straight while lying prone
  - Extends table length by 10–12 inches
  - May be stationary or adjustable
  - Other options include face hole in table (with plug) and prone pillow

Massage Table Accessories
- Arm shelf
  - Provide resting place for arms when client is in prone position
- Side extensions
  - Provide resting place for arms when client is in supine position

Massage Table Accessories
- Footrest
  - Can increase table length by 10–12 inches
- Carrying case
  - Protects fabric from damage
  - Provides handles and straps for lifting and carrying table
- Table carts
  - Allow table to be rolled across floor

Massage Table Accessories
- Bolsters
  - Enhance spine and muscle relaxation
  - Many shapes available
  - Made of foam or stuffed
  - Multiple sizes for customized fit

Massage Chairs
- Used in malls, airports, offices
- Fully clothed massage
- Cost is about same as massage table
- Key features—portability, weight, stability
Massage Linens

• Sheets
  – Top and bottom sheets, bolster and face rest covers, pillowcases and eye pillow covers, and armrest covers
  – Popular fabrics are flannel, cotton, cotton blends, and percale
• Towels
  – Can be used as top drapes

Massage Linens

• Blankets
  – Provides warmth
  – Weight adds comfort
• Massage linen care
  – Launder after each use
  – Replace when stained, odorous, or threadbare

Massage Media

• Primary purpose: reduces the friction between the therapist’s hands and forearms and the client’s skin
• Too little lubricant can cause burning sensation on client’s skin

Massage Medium Guidelines

• Does it nourish the skin?
  – Cold-pressed vegetable, nut and seed oils are good for the skin
  – Avoid mineral oil and isopropyl alcohol as they clog pores and deplete nutrients
  – Stearyl and cetyl alcohol are safe ingredients found in many creams and lotions

Massage Medium Guidelines

• How will the skin react to it?
  – Ask the client about potential allergies to products in the massage medium
  – Keep a copy of all product ingredient lists
• How will the skin react to it?
  – Keep hypoallergenic cream or lotion on hand for use when requested or when you are unsure how a client might react to your primary lubricant
  – Hypoallergenic products have undergone testing for allergenicity and found not to cause reactions in the majority of test subjects
  – Hypoallergenic does not guarantee a product will not cause an allergic reaction
Massage Medium Guidelines

• How will massage linens react to it?
  – Oil-based products are more likely to stain than water-based products
  – Bottom linens are more likely to stain than top linens
  – Stained linens appear unsanitary (even if clean) and should be replaced

Massage Medium Guidelines

• How much does it cost?
  – Cost depends on therapist’s finances and importance placed on lubricant quality
  – Quality tends to be more expensive

Using Lubricants

• Factors affecting amount of lubricant required:
  – Emollient properties of lubricant
  – Dryness of the client’s skin
  – Amount of body hair the client has
  – Massage type and therapist intent
• Less is better: more can be added as needed

Types of Lubricants

• Cream
  – The best-selling lubricant
  – More emollient than other lubricants
  – Less messy than other media; most expensive

• Butters
  – Made from fruits, nuts, or seeds
  – Extremely hydrating
  – Allergic reactions are rare

Types of Lubricants

• Oils and gels
  – Relatively inexpensive
  – Nut and seed oils preferred
  – Drawback: most staining to cloth

• Lotions
  – Two different uses: rehabilitation and spa
  – Deep tissue lotions used for specific injuries and conditions
  – Hydrating lotions used as finishing treatment

Types of Lubricants

• Powder
  – Minimal friction reduction
  – Used when doing lymphatic drainage and massage during labor

• Liniments
  – Used as analgesics
  – All liniments are rubefacient and provide the sensation of heat
  – Avoid using near mucous membranes
Lubricant Dispenser
- Either single-use or pump dispenser best
  - Prevents cross-contamination
- Dispenser can be placed on table between client’s knees
- Holsters available to suspend dispenser from waist or hips

Storage and Shelf Life
- Store lubricants in cool, dark place
- Shelf life of 12 to 18 months
- Refrigeration or freezing extends shelf life 1 additional year

Massage Supplies
- Bought frequently: paper towels, drinking cups
- Bought less frequently and kept for customer convenience: hair spray, cotton balls, etc.

Massage Supplies Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Routine Massage Supplies</th>
<th>Periodic Massage Supplies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client care products</td>
<td>- Medical records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disposable gloves and sink wares</td>
<td>- Sterile skin cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cleaning and disinfection supplies</td>
<td>- Adhesive tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Box of facial tissues</td>
<td>- Axillary tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Paper towels</td>
<td>- Dental floss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Kitchen sponges</td>
<td>- Disposable sponges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mandrel</td>
<td>- Disposable cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disinfectant sprays</td>
<td>- Antiseptic spray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contact lens solution</td>
<td>- Disinfectant wipes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wipes</td>
<td>- Sodium hypochlorite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Debonding tape</td>
<td>- Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vitamin E oil</td>
<td>- Cotton balls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furnishing the Massage Room
- Furnishings help to create the proper atmosphere
- Other important room characteristics—window treatments, light sources, and floor and wall treatments

Furnishing the Massage Room
- Mirror
  - Used for client grooming, client assessment, and room decor
- Clocks
  - Help keep therapist on schedule
  - Help regulate timed treatments
  - Should be more easily seen by therapist than by client
Furnishing the Massage Room

- **Water dispenser**
  - Consider offering water to clients before and after each massage
- **Wastebasket**
  - Most states require lidded type; foot-operated models are preferable

Furnishing the Massage Room

- **Supply cabinet**
  - Should have doors to keep supplies out of sight; vented cabinets help reduce odors from linens
- **Chairs and stools**
  - Chair is convenient for client for dressing
  - Therapists often use stools when massaging neck, face, and extremities
  - Best-designed stools are easy to adjust

Furnishing the Massage Room

- **Storage for client’s personal items**
  - Small baskets are handy for keys and other small but important items
- **Wall hangings**
  - Can be used to enhance ambiance, inform and educate client, provide acoustical properties, and add professionalism
  - Consider the type of practice you have and atmosphere you want to create

Furnishing the Massage Room

- **Window treatments**
  - Provide wall decoration, reduce sound, block or filter light, and provide privacy
- **Flooring**
  - Carpet is best choice—provides warmth, sound absorption, and safety
- **Sound proofing**
  - Interior walls can be insulated or sound-absorbing panels can be used

Massage Room Environment

- **Beyond the therapist’s professional appearance, atmosphere is key to client appeal**
- **Room characteristics contributing to atmosphere include light, music, temperature, and color**

Massage Room Environment

- **Light**
  - Two or more light levels may be used in the studio
  - Best light source: sunlight
  - Indirect lighting can be used on overcast days or after dusk
Massage Room Environment

• Music
  – Helps therapist to keep rhythm of movements
  – Soft, slow music with an even melody or nature sounds help clients to relax
  – Provide a variety of music choices or allow clients to bring their own

• Room temperature
  – Ideal room temperature approximately 75°F
  – Be prepared to make adjustments
  – Massage tends to cool the body
  – Therapists should wear loose clothing or use a small fan to keep themselves cool

• Color
  – Divided into “warm” and “cool” categories
  – Warm colors create feeling of warmth and stimulation
  – Cool colors create cool, relaxing feeling
  – Consider shade when choosing colors

Safety Guidelines for the Treatment Facility

• Comply with state and municipal building fire and safety codes
• Have current liability insurance
• Maintain a fire extinguisher and smoke detector
• Post fire escape routes and mark all building exits
• Provide public telephones with adjustable volume control
• Keep list of emergency numbers by the telephone
• Display street address on outside of the building
• Maintain all equipment in safe condition
Summary

• Tools of the trade support a massage therapist's knowledge, skills, and abilities
• Choice of massage table is important
• Consider cleaning and disinfection when selecting massage linens and media
• A carefully designed massage environment can tie everything together
• Follow safety guidelines to maintain safe, accessible facility