Overview

Massage therapy can be used either to stimulate activity (nervous system, muscles, etc.) or for calming (alleviate anxiety in residents with Alzheimer’s). Massage can be used to address chronic pain, anxiety, muscle weakness, reduce muscle spasms, stiffness and joint pain, decrease stress and depression, stimulate bowels and flow of lymph, stimulate circulation, lower blood pressure, improve sleep and increase mobility. In addition, massage therapy can increase physical and social interaction for elders.

When used properly, massage can be used alongside or in place of drug therapy. Always consult a resident’s physician before initiating a massage therapy program.

Considerations

1. Who in your population do you want served?
2. Will clients be in chairs, beds, or wheelchairs?
3. Is there a quiet, warm space for the massage to take place?
4. Do you want professional massage therapists who have been trained in geriatric massage?
5. Who will pay for these services?
6. Do you want the massage performed by volunteers?
7. Is there a massage school in your area that you could create an alliance with?
8. Does the staff support the implementation of a massage program?
9. Is the family supportive of residents receiving massage?
10. Consider hiring a Professional Geriatric Massage Therapist to evaluate your facility and make recommendations.

Steps to Implement

Setting up a program is not difficult but being clear of goals and intentions that will create a successful program takes some time and dedication. Input from the interdisciplinary team is important in the development of a program.

Check with your liability insurance carrier and local DHHS office for specific requirements related to implementation of the program.
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Pain Tool Kit 21.