



Self-Care through Tellington TTouch

Supporting Resilience in an Alzheimer's Facility

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Patients in nursing homes may be in physical pain. They have probably lost their social roles, may be limited to wheelchairs for mobility and may have lost or are losing their very connection to themselves. A nursing home in the midwest has taken the concept of culture change in medical care very seriously.

The Wellness Director of this Nursing Home facility finds new ways to manage behavior and reduce physical, psychological and spiritual pain, when needed. Tellington TTouch, a gentle method of body work using circular touches that communicate caring, support and acceptance is one of the methods which the Director has introduced.

Some of the residents at The Facility have dementia and some do not, but all of the residents there require the level of care offered in a nursing home as they approach the end of life. The Wellness Director was experienced in Tellington TTouch. She intuitively knew this method could engage the staff and seniors in a renewed, compassionate connection of respectful and effective care while simultaneously improving the quality of life for both.

When patients can no longer communicate in words, communication through TTouch has been used to reduce fear and pain, increase mental clarity, support memory and assist in smooth transfers from beds and wheel chairs. Most importantly, Tellington TTouch communicates through the universal language of touch, that someone is there to accompany the person through their feelings; anxiety, depression, fearfulness or pain that both aging seniors and Alzheimer's patients often experience.

Linda Tellington-Jones, Tellington TTouch Founder, believes that healthcare must include a strong self-care component for care-givers.

Self-care was a major focus of the Tellington TTouch training at this Nursing Home facility. Led by Linda Tellington Jones and her assistants,



the training was unique in being offered for the staff at The Facility.

All who assisted in the workshop witnessed how TTouch helped the staff, often burdened with personal worries recover their energy for life and joy in the work of their chosen profession. We saw how the seniors absolutely melted into the hands offering TTouch and how some shed tears of relief and surprise when TTouched for the first time.

Initially and understandably, some staff at The Facility were suspicious of these circular touches and reluctant to believe that TTouch could do anything to help them with the agitation, crying, anger, sleeplessness or inability of some of their patients to participate in medical activities necessary for ongoing care.

Once Linda Tellington-Jones helped the staff to experience the benefits of TTouch with pain and stress reduction for themselves. They also heard positive reports from other staff who were successfully using the TTouches they had learned to address issues at home. TTouch was embraced by those who experienced or witnessed the positive change it could provide.

As usual, working with Linda Tellington-Jones was an experience in miracles. We witnessed the reduction in swelling and pain relief in nearly one third of attendees. One person in the training, who had recently fallen, presented a terribly bruised foot that was purple, hot and sensitive to touch.

Linda demonstrated how to bring down swelling with light “Raccoon” TTouches with her fingers repeatedly dipped in cool water. Literally, within moments and before our very eyes, the swelling reduced, the skin became supple and less tender to the touch and the dark purple color almost disappeared. This person, who had been pallid from pain, had cheeks that took on a rosey glow.

Another staff member described how much trouble she was having with her son’s hyperactivity. His bedtime resistance and prolonged bedtime routine was wearing her down. After just one day of TTouch instruction, this young mother was empowered to add TTouch to her son’s bedtime



ritual. His bedtime routine was reduced from one hour to fifteen minutes before he fell asleep.

We can all imagine that with the pressures of children, work and school, no parent can meet all of their child's needs for connection, physical touch and mirroring. The resulting lack of connection during the day can lead to bedtime issues. TTouch empowered this mother to address her child's needs. The gentle connection was soothing and allowed her son to fall asleep without a struggle.

Another staff found the instructions for stopping the acid reflux was almost instantly effective. A nun on staff found pain relief for rheumatoid arthritis.

Techniques for offering TTouch to people in bed or in wheelchairs were very helpful. Headaches were relieved, fatigue vanished and, and the staff themselves began to feel better. Some staff felt they had been given a new tool to calm, comfort and connect with a resident at the end of life. The staff started to understand how much could be provided with this gentle touch.

Feelings of helplessness, loss and isolation can lead staff to lean on defensive behaviors that aren't helpful or healthy. In an article about developing resilient staff in the helping professions, it has been noted that workers protect themselves and others from the negative effects of stress in the work environment by becoming numb, drained, exhausted, cynical or overwhelmed to the point of helplessness and hopelessness, avoidance and a reduction in empathy have been seen.*

These feelings represent many universal responses to work stress of this type. Through the TTouch training the staff experienced social support and a new sense of community. The staff received a new tool that can transform challenging situations.

*Vicarious Trauma and Resilience by S. Megan Berthold, PhD, LCSW, CTS
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