



Uncommon Interest, Training, Compassion

INAUGURAL ISSUE 2009

President's Letter

Welcome! We are delighted and eager to share this first issue of the S4OM Newsletter; our touchstone for community. We are excited about this new benefit and look forward to future editions. Many many thanks to the Newsletter Committee, and all those who have talked about and generated this first edition. We wouldn't be here without you!

As I sit writing this first message, one thing is clear to me: we are a quietly courageous group. We are paving a new path. Our vision and mission guide us in creating a community founded in a philosophy of compassion and service. We have set many goals, and hold many aspirations. My personal favorite is to provide a forum where we share the special challenges and joys of our work. I already see us reaching out to each other, our clients and community through our connections as a Society.

We go about our work without a lot of fanfare, and we do so in a time of vast global and personal challenges. Our individual work finds us walking with our clients; connecting and empowering the healing process through touch and our ability to be present with another. We all know this can be a phenomenal experience which enriches our lives as much as those we serve.

My hope is that together we build a supportive professional community that engenders respect, fosters learning, and broadens the available services and resources for those touched by cancer. We are on a path that promotes an ethic of care and sets a high standard of excellence for our clients and our profession.

In closing, I must say thank you! To all our members who are walking with us in this new path; to the Education Committee and instructors for their substantial contribution in designing a critical component in our structure; to the Board of Directors for their ongoing efforts at harnessing our collective and individual energy; and to those dedicated behind-the-scenes volunteers who are instrumental in designing and facilitating the 2010 Oncology Massage Healing Summit.

Everyone's efforts demonstrate our commitment to uncommon interest, training, and compassion. May we all be blessed by the work of our hands. Until our next edition... be well and be in touch.

Namaste
Meg

Meet the Board

Harriet Jahr-Philips, LMT, NCTMB

The Society for Oncology Massage (S4OM) was founded in May 2007 by an established group of pioneers in the field who were defining common standards of practice, medical guidelines and ethical codes of conduct. These practitioners formed a board of directors and launched a professional society that validates the use of applied massage therapy to ease the journey through cancer and beyond for patients, family members and caregivers.

Three board members, Bruce Hopkins, Meg Robsahm and Linda Dwyer, are featured in this edition. Future publications will introduce the remaining board members.



Bruce Hopkins, the key person behind the Society for Oncology Massage, transitioned to this career in 2004 after owning and operating his own company, which was preceded by a well-established career holding executive management positions in several major companies. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering (BSME) from MIT and an MBA from Dartmouth College. After receiving his massage certificate, first in his class, at the Downeast School of Massage in Waldoboro, Maine, he went on to earn an oncology massage certificate from Banner Desert Hospital in Arizona, by attending Gayle MacDonald's oncology training. Bruce established The Oncology Massage Programs at Mercy Hospital in Portland, Maine and later, the Society for Oncology Massage, bringing together key people from the field of oncology massage. He is a cancer survivor and facilitates a prostate cancer support group. Bruce also holds membership in several established

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Reflections

Jamie Elswick, LMT

In being asked to submit a story for the pilot newsletter for S4OM, I received a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the past five years as an oncology massage therapist. Even in this relatively short span of time I have so many stories, so I chose one about the reason this work sustains and nurtures me.

The road I have taken with the work we do has many paths. I have worked in private practice, inpatient, outpatient and hospice and love all of them. Probably the environment that has provoked the deepest place in my heart has been through end of life care and so this story takes place at the crossroads of a life well lived and nearing its end here on earth.

I met J. and her family about two weeks before her passing. Even in her declining state in which she was quite fragile, her beauty within and without radiated from her being. The slightest amount of movement involved with her care brought about a great deal of pain that she managed with an incredible sense of humor and grace. For the first week I worked with her she was fairly cognizant, but as time passed, the need to increase the pain medication clouded our verbal communication. Mostly she would seem to be asleep, but would awake periodically and speak one or two sentences often with amazing clarity. During one session she said she felt the massage was making her whole again for her journey.

J.'s husband provided incredible support to her and their children, however as many of us have witnessed, being a primary caregiver can take its toll. One evening J. was experiencing a great deal of pain and anxiety after being moved by her husband to change her bedding, so I followed up by working on her feet to soothe her. As I watched her husband it appeared he was experiencing his own discomfort in the form of back pain. I offered to work on him when his wife had fallen asleep. On their king size bed, his wife rested comfortably and I worked on his back as he lay next to her telling me the beautiful love story of their life together. J. died the following morning.

I often think of the gift of working with them, driving the winding road to their home near the top of a mountain with an expansive view, it was fall and the trees were golden. Witnessing transition can be powerful whether it is from this life, the seasons or into whatever form healing takes with our clients. We are so fortunate to be able to provide both a gift of service and do what we love. This work sustains and nurtures me and so I hope the same for all of you.

Do you have a story to share? Send your submissions: ATTN: Anita at – newsletter@S4OM.org. Please include your name and contact information.

MEET THE BOARD *continued from front page*

groups in the massage and oncology fields while remaining a trustee for the Cancer Community Center in South Portland, Maine. Recognition for his many contributions for 2008 include the WCSH and United Way of Greater Portland, 6-Who-Care Award and The Governor's Exemplary Service Award from the state of Maine.

Being the originator of the S4OM concept, we asked Bruce what his goals are for S4OM. "To provide a limited degree of standardization and vetting of oncology massage therapists. To create awareness of the specialty in the medical/nursing community. To make patients aware of the benefits and bring patients and therapists together." It is also Bruce's vision to "develop professionalism among practitioners, while giving practitioners an identity and professional credentials."

Bruce's involvement includes designing, building and managing the website; incorporating the organization; and continuing to be the cornerstone for the development of the society.



Meg Robsahm, president of S4OM, has been practicing massage since 2001 with a focus on restorative, therapeutic and oncology massage. Her practice, Compassionate Therapies, is located in Everett and Monroe, Washington. She is a 2007 graduate of the Peregrine Institute of Oncology Massage Training. Meg is a frequent guest lecturer/presenter and has the pleasure of teaching "Massage for People Living with Cancer"® developed by Gayle MacDonald.

"As president I am striving to develop a solid organizational foundation that allows for growth and accommodates changes as they occur in this evolving profession of oncology massage. At the heart of this goal is my desire to create and support a community of skilled and compassionate therapist who reach out to each other, their clients and community."

The board intends to move the organization forward with deliberate focus and unity. They welcome your suggestions and encourage your active involvement.



Linda Dwyer, treasurer and initial board advisor to the newsletter group, came to massage therapy through family illness. Seeing the importance and value of touch for those with life threatening conditions, massage school was the natural choice for a second career after a layoff from a corporate position. Following graduation from Onondaga School of Therapeutic Massage in Rochester, N.Y., she went on to train in Daybreak Geriatric Massage with Joyce Garland and in oncology massage with Gayle MacDonald and Cheryl Chapman. Her practice, located at the Lifetime Care facility in Rochester, N.Y., includes oncology massage for those living with cancer and working with children with life altering or threatening disease and their family members.

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“Knowledge exists to be imparted”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ann Simmons is working with the Education Committee to bring more of the latest knowledge and information to this section in our next issue. Your suggestions are always welcome. Send email to ATTN: Ann at – newsletter@s4om.org. Please include your name and contact information.

2010 Oncology Massage Healing Summit Northwestern Health Sciences University, Minneapolis, MN April 30 – May 1, 2010

Stay tuned to the S4OM website and check the next issue of the newsletter for the latest details and information about the Summit.

Be sure to check the website at S4OM.org

- Check out the **new** info regarding –
Chemotherapy – To glove or not?
- Renew your membership using PayPal
- Update your info in the locator section

MEET THE BOARD

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Linda's initial involvement with the idea for S4OM came several months before the 2007 Oncology Massage Healing Summit.

Linda had contacted Gayle with her own ideas regarding some sort of national organization. Gayle suggested Linda contact Bruce Hopkins, as he had already developed a prototype website with ideas and goals similar to hers. The Summit provided a chance to meet others interested in developing an organization to bring us all together in order to provide the public education and access to those of us practicing.

It is Linda's vision for S4OM “to see our society viewed as the premier/ eminent organization providing education, research and qualified compassionate therapists to the medical community and the public. I would like to see our members take part in research to promote the efficacy of our work and for them to be motivated to write and be published. Cynthia Myers has paved our way for the research and writing. Let's all aspire to her work and accomplishment.”

Practical Issues

Mary Lou Ross, LMT



Choosing to take insurance can be challenging in most states. Florida and Washington have insurance laws that help to facilitate insurance reimbursement.

This section will start the process of exchanging information relating to this issue.

One company that I have been in contact with is called American Specialty Health Networks (ASH). ASH contracts with traditional health plans, sometimes eliminating medical referral requirements, thereby allowing “direct access,” through supplemental benefit riders, to complementary healthcare providers. ASH is contracted with different insurance companies in different states. I am in Georgia and know they are affiliated with Alliance HealthCard, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia, CIGNA HealthCare, UNICARE and others. Besides credentialing, ASH requires professional liability/comprehensive insurance and an on-site office evaluation before acceptance into the system. There is no fee to participate in their network, but like most insurance companies, ASH has a fee schedule. You can contact ASH at 888-511-2743 to request information regarding your particular state. For those of you who already have working relationships concerning insurance companies, please share this information with us so we can all learn from each other.

Share your tips on various topics with Mary Lou Ross: ATTN: Mary Lou at – newsletter@S4OM.org. Please include your name and contact information.

Making Connections...

Anita Bakke, LMT

A primary direction of the Board is to “connect” our members. With the creation of S4OM, the building of its membership, right up to this newsletter itself, movement in that direction continues and helps the society grow and project a professional image. Look for each issue to spotlight members in a selected area or state. Making connections with colleagues in our professional society is the intention of this section.

This issue focuses on making connections with two S4OM members from Arizona. They are Nicole M. Albert, LMT, CMLDT and Steven Paul Dawson, LMT.



Nicole M. Albert

To get the ball rolling, my conversation with Nicole “Nikki” Albert began with excitement you can feel even in her voice, and the question of how she came to be interested in oncology massage. Nikki, like many of us, got a “baptism by fire” with an on-the-job experience her first time. When asked by a friend to provide a massage to her father who was terminally ill with pancreatic cancer,

Nikki agreed. While initially nervous, she said, “Once in his presence I knew what to do” to bring him comfort. He passed the next day. “I felt so honored to have been able to share in his final hours,” Nikki stated. It was several years later, while teaching in a massage program, that a fellow teacher handed her a brochure for a Gayle MacDonald Massage for People Living with Cancer class. Nikki relates her attitude toward that training. “I attended (that class) and have been hooked on the work ever since.”

When asked why she is “hooked” on oncology massage, Nikki explained, “I learn something new from everyone I work with. I feel drawn to this work in a way I can’t fully explain.”

Nikki’s reasons for joining S4OM and her hopes for its future align with the direction of the society in several ways. “There is so much misinformation about what massage can and cannot do with regard to cancer. I think it is so important to have a reliable source that will present the facts. I am excited about an organization that will keep the public up-to-date (regarding) bodywork and cancer.” In closing our conversation, Nikki validated association with S4OM as a means of improving credibility as a practitioner. She looks forward to S4OM becoming a resource that she can refer people to when asked about her background in oncology massage and for other information regarding cancer and massage.



Steven Dawson

When making contact with our second featured member from Arizona, you find that Steven “Steve” Dawson has easiness to his manner, attentiveness in his listening, and an unexpected depth of knowledge on many subjects.

In telling his story, he started with the early 1990s and spoke of the massage school he attended which “taught that cancer was contraindicated for massage and (how) they referred (students) to the American Cancer Society guidelines at the time.” Almost ten years later, “when friends and family (became) diagnosed with cancer,” Steve began his search for more information on the possibility of massage easing the discomfort he was painfully aware those he cared about were experiencing. The search led him to find a publication called “Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer” by Gayle MacDonald, along with training for oncology massage. He soon registered for the next session in the area. “It felt great to know that a major hospital, Desert Samaritan Medical Center, part of the Banner Health System, was hosting (this session) and there would be hands on training with real patients,” Steve stated. At the time, most oncologists knew little about the benefits of massage for cancer patients. Steve shared that “the physicians I dealt with were willing to accept certification through the Banner Health System.”

The emotional rollercoaster of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery is well known to Steve personally, as a friend and an oncology massage practitioner. His sister was diagnosed with leukemia and needed a peripheral blood stem cell (PBSC) donor. Steve was first to say yes to the request and was tested. His sister is still receiving treatment, but she is now back working and continues regaining her strength. Steve declared, “I have felt the helplessness (in people) and been honored to share in the joyful experience of bringing comfort and hope to some of those same people.”

Steve’s deep steady voice clearly resounds that he is “thankful that a group of like-minded people have come together to create the S4OM.” He feels that as S4OM’s alliances with oncologists, support groups, and treatment centers grow, patients will benefit significantly in symptom management and overall well-being. Well aware that like all good things, it takes time to grow an idea, Steve believes “even the tiniest of seeds, grow tall and bear fruit.” He looks forward to the future of oncology massage for all facets of the community and is enthusiastic to be a part of that future.

Urgent Message:

If you are a current member of S4OM, remember that membership renewal is due April 1, 2009.

Due to technical difficulties, the membership renewal deadline has been extended until May 30th. Renew Today!

Please renew by Paypal. Consult www.s4om.org for more information.

Also, if you are listed on our locator service, please keep your contact information updated and accurate on our website.

Laugh Out Loud

I was attending my first class on massage for people with cancer.

Survivors were relating their stories to us.

One of the Survivors was very enthusiastic stating how she could now mow her grass without her shirt on. When she was asked to show us her breasts she replied, " Sure they're in the fanny pack by the chair. Just pass them around and let everyone get a good feel!"

The room exploded in laughter.

Share your humorous stories /jokes with Mary Lou Ross:
ATTN: Mary Lou at- newsletter@S4OM.org.
Please include your name and contact information.



Enlighten Us

This is your newsletter, what do you want to see in here? Let us know.

While this section is empty this issue, we hope that in our next installment, this section will yield comments on our articles, concerns you might have and/or discussion topics you'd like to see highlighted. It is essentially a potpourri of things you feel need to be addressed.

If you liked an article, want more information or have information you'd like to share with your colleagues, please let us know.

TELL US WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR NEWSLETTER. Send your thoughts via email to: newsletter@S4OM.org, ATTN: Enlighten Us. Include your name and contact information.

Mission Statement

S4OM is grounded in a philosophy of compassion and service. We are focused on connecting cancer patients, their families and their caregivers with skilled oncology massage therapists.

An oncology massage therapist is a massage therapist who, following comprehensive training in general massage therapy, has completed additional "post-graduate" training addressing the full spectrum of cancer-related issues: the physical consequences of cancer, the side effects of various treatments, the psycho-social and emotional consequences. Therapists learn to adapt the extensive repertoire of standard massage therapy techniques to work safely and effectively with people living with cancer.

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NEWSLETTER 4 Oncology Massage

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S4OM is an all volunteer organization.