

# Physiological Effect of Touch Therapy and Aromatherapy on Palliative Patients

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## **Background:**

Palliative patients have to overcome lots of pain of various kinds. In order to alleviate their suffering, the medical personnel, besides relying on traditional medical means, sometimes use complementary and alternative medicine (complementary and alternative medicine, CAM) to relieve their patients' discomfort of symptoms and improve their quality of life.

One of the most popular therapies, aromatherapy, has been widely used at many medical institutes. Aromatherapy involves the use of essential oil of different aromas, which is extracted from roots, stems, leaves, seeds, fruit or flowers of some medicinal plants. Aromatherapy has been said to soothe moods, relieve tension and provide comfort. By means of using essential oil in massage, bath and sniffing, aromatherapy can maintain a good balance between patients' bodies and minds.

Another method care-givers use is touch therapy, the most commonly used method being gentle stroking of patients' bodies, mainly their hands, arms, shoulders, backs or heads. It has been said to provide patients with emotional support and body comfort, sending messages of care and love, thus, also improving the relationship between the patients and their care-givers.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of aromatherapy and touch therapy, and compare the two.

## **Methods:**

Sixty palliative patients participated in this research, in which they were evenly divided into two groups, one receiving massage with essential oil, the other receiving gentle stroking touch therapy, to determine whether or not these treatments help relieve the patients' discomfort levels, and how long the lasting effect is. As well, the research also compares the effectiveness of both of the therapies.

Each patient in both groups received 30 minutes of the respective therapy. Several

criteria including vital signs, perception of pain and distress scale were measured before and after the treatment, and again after 8 hours and 24 hours.

The results and data were analyzed according to the description, Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test (Nonparametric Test) of statistical methods.

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**Results:**

The study confirms:

1. After either one of the treatments, the patients feel their discomfort levels have improved after 30 minutes, 8 hours, and 24 hours. The effectiveness even reaches up to 24 hours.
2. There is no significant difference regarding the effectiveness between aromatherapy and gentle stroking touches.

**Conclusions:**

This research can be used as a reference for clinical nurses and other care-givers to develop their own independent programs to help relieve their patients' discomfort and help enhance their relationship with their families or care-givers.