

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light pink patterned headscarf and a matching pink robe, is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The lighting is soft and warm, coming from the window. The background is a bright, slightly blurred view of the outdoors.

A Healing Touch

Five spas discuss their oncology services, and the power of catering to clients with cancer.

by Molly Brown

Ask anyone who has experienced it or helped a loved one through it—cancer impacts every aspect of a person's health and well-being. Although there was a time when spas may have shied away from offering services to guests who were battling the disease in its many forms, that's no longer the case. According to Oncology Training International (OTI), an organization that educates spa workers around the world, there's a tremendous demand for such offerings—especially given the staggering statistic that as many as four in ten people will get cancer in their lifetimes.

To date, OTI has trained approximately 4,000 spa pros in the U.S. alone, helping them provide the safest and most nurturing services possible. "It's not just about completing a course and becoming a certified oncology esthetician or massage therapist, but also about the deep compassion these service providers possess, and the profound connections they form with their clients," notes Ursula Froehlich, president of Margot European Day Spa in Birmingham, Michigan. Indeed, offering oncology spa treatments can be as enriching and rewarding for your staff and your business as receiving them is for the individuals dealing with the devastating effects of their diseases.

Margot European Day Spa

Birmingham, Michigan

Froehlich has helped clients with cancer for more than 20 years—a journey that began when the medical director of the Breast Care Center at the University of Michigan was seeking a place to send patients for wellness services. “Until recently, we weren’t allowed to offer massage therapy because some physicians believed it made the cancer ‘spread,’” says Froehlich. “But with new research, doctors are not only recognizing the benefits of massage—as well as skin care and hydrotherapy—for their patients, they’re now encouraging it!”

The Margot oncology service menu features a Restorative Oligomer Spa Scrub & Massage (80 min./\$170); Restorative Remineralizing Body Wrap (75 min./\$155); Restorative Sea Calm Facial (60 min./\$150); and Restorative Oncology Body Massage (60 min./\$145). “We use only Phytomer products, which contain sea ingredients, and we customize each service to help soothe the body and mind,” says Froehlich, explaining that the power of marine ingredients is often overlooked, but useful for helping the body remineralize and heal. “It’s so fulfilling to be able to play a positive role in our clients’ lives,” she concludes. “Their gratitude is immense, and we’re proud to be able to offer them a wellness boost.”



Eden Organics Salon & Spa

Doylestown and Newtown, Pennsylvania, and Allentown, New Jersey

Founded by registered nurse and certified esthetician Catherine Chamberlain in 2010, Eden Organics began offering oncology-specific services the following year. “I know how difficult cancer treatment is for the mind, body and soul, so this is my way of incorporating my work experience as a nurse and love of caring for others,” explains Chamberlain. Offerings include the Oncology Skin Care Facial (50 min./\$60) and Oncology Massage (50-90 min./\$75-\$115).

All Eden estheticians and massage therapists are oncology certified, and the business has always been dedicated to using the gentlest products in its full range of services—a benefit to those undergoing radiation or chemotherapy, who tend to have highly sensitive skin. “We use our own line of Earth Pure Organics skin care for all spa treatments, including the oncology options,” says Chamberlain. “The formulas are natural, organic, vegan and free of parabens, phthalates and synthetic fragrances.”

In 2016, Chamberlain also launched the Eden Cares Program, which provides complimentary services—including facials, massage, makeup and lash application, and hair and scalp treatments—on select Sundays and Mondays to clients undergoing cancer treatment. “The most rewarding part is being able to give guests some time focused on them in a therapeutic yet nonmedical way, and to know we made a positive impact at a challenging time,” she says.



Steve Hightower Hair Salon & Day Spa Atlanta

Salon owner and hair stylist Steve Hightower has specialized in thinning hair and regrowth since 2003, so it made perfect sense to start offering oncology services three years ago. “We’ve all known someone with cancer, and our goal is to bring those who are suffering from the disease some joy and relief from their pain—and help them feel pretty when they look in the mirror,” says Hightower. With the help of three skilled staff members—oncology certified massage therapist David Whaley, oncology licensed esthetician Tamara Townsend, and medical wig and hair piece expert Rebecca Walden—the spa’s cancer care menu now includes Oncology Massage (60 min./\$80) and a Décolleté Facial (60 min./\$75).

Whaley is a Reiki master and polarity practitioner as well, so he uses those modalities along with light pressure and oils during the massage to relieve fatigue and soothe dry skin. Meanwhile, Townsend modifies skincare therapies based on the client’s specific cancer and treatment side effects, and will often offer lighter cleansing and nutrient-rich, seaweed-based products that are gentle and healing. Medical wigs, made with either synthetic or human hair, are also available. When it comes to hair services, Hightower tries to start early. “If they’ve just been diagnosed, we like to have them come in before they lose their hair,” he says, explaining that this makes it easier to create the most natural-looking piece.



Spa Gregorie's Newport Beach, California

Scott Duncan, president of Spa Gregorie's, had his first experience working with a client with cancer nearly 25 years ago. “He was a gentleman with stage IV cancer, and formal oncology training didn’t exist at that time, so I just modified the massage to adjust to his comfort level,” recalls Duncan. “I remember that experience like it was yesterday, and I’ll hold it in my heart forever.” In 2003, Spa Gregorie's added services by oncology trained massage therapists and estheticians to its menu, including Oncology Massage (30-90 min./\$69-\$165) and Oncology Facials (60 min./\$119; 75 min./\$139).

The same year, Duncan founded Greet the Day, which offers complimentary spa services and half-day retreats for cancer patients. “I wanted to develop a charitable program that would allow our therapists the opportunity to give back to the cancer community through the art of touch within our space,” explains Duncan. The nonprofit also provides professionally accredited continuing education classes, which include Oncology Skin Care and Facial Treatments (\$495 for a three-day course); Oncology Massage (\$495 for a three-day course); and Aromatherapy in Health Care (\$120 for a two-day course). “The third tier of our mission statement is to ‘make a significant contribution to the community,’” says Duncan. “It’s rewarding to know that this organization has served thousands of people affected by cancer, and has nurtured and trained countless service providers.”



TOP: COURTESY STEVE HIGHTOWER HAIR SALON & DAY SPA; BOTTOM: COURTESY SPA GREGORIE'S

a healing touch

Skin Deep Salon & Spa Coralville, Iowa

A cancer survivor herself, Skin Deep owner Tracy Lacina has provided oncology offerings since 2010. Current options include hair and wig services (Skin Deep partners with nonprofit Strands of Strength, which provides free wigs to women in need); face and body treatments; and relaxation, guided meditation and healing touch rituals. Each option lasts approximately 60 minutes, and the price never exceeds \$55, notes Lacina.

When working with “health challenged” spa-goers, therapists consider their medical history and current issues, which may include nausea, chemotherapy-induced rashes and radiation dermatitis. “My goal with every client is to calm, soothe and hydrate the skin, but each guest is going to come in with their own specific situation—different chemotherapy for different cancers—and all of this must be taken into consideration when setting up a spa visit,” Lacina says.

All of these offerings are performed by oncology-trained professionals—including Lacina’s daughter, a licensed cosmetologist who assists with hair loss, cranial prosthetics and nail issues that can arise from cancer treatment. “There are times when someone walks through the door losing the fight, and more than anything they need to escape,” says Lacina. “That’s when I really have to step up my game to bring them the most relaxing experience possible. When your client finally reaches that state of total relaxation and you see the stress leave their face, you know you made a difference. That’s all the reward I need.” 🍵



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