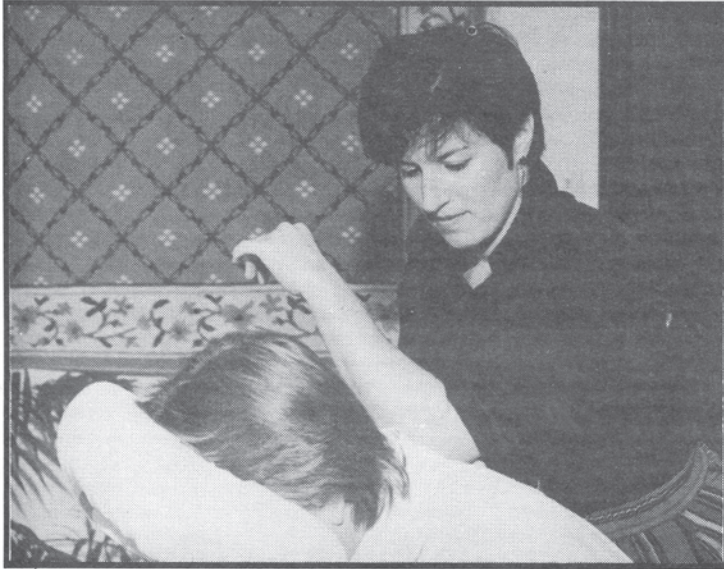


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*Theresa Crisci, owner of Therapeutic Life Connection in Branford, demonstrates the 12-minute chair massage that is gaining popularity as a company benefit for stress reduction in the workplace.*

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## Relaxing the corporate body

Wes Sager would like the 10-minute massage to replace the 10-minute coffee break.

Sager, administrative director of the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy Inc. in Newington, says the 10-minute massage benefits a person more than the coffee break. "A 12- or 15-minute chair massage brings circulation up and revives people's mental acuity," he says.

Sager says benefits to the office environment — besides the obvious one of stress reduction — are increased productivity and a drop in absenteeism.

John Talley, vice president of technology services for Cigna Corp.'s individual insurance systems, is always at his office on Mondays. That's due in part to his weekly 11-11:15 a.m. appointment with Barbara Nelms, owner of the Manchester-based Riverbend Therapeutic Massage. Nelms has been contracted by Cigna and Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company to provide chair massages at work sites for employees.

Chair massages, which are shorter and in which the client remains clothed, are becoming more popular as a benefit for companies to offer, says Sager. In most cases, a company contracts for a massage therapist to come into the office one or two days a week.

"You know how sometimes your shoulders touch your ears," says Talley, explaining the impact stress causes on the body. With the massages, "it takes longer for that to happen," he says. Talley has been receiving massages for two

years and the fact that his shoulders do not touch his ears is just one of the benefits.

He says he has some lower back problems that are eased by Nelms' fingers. And he says "it's a nice way to treat myself."

The cost of the 12-minute massage that Theresa Crisci offers in the workplace is \$15. Hour-long full body massages range in price from \$50 to \$100.

Crisci left her job at Southern New England Telephone to become a massage therapist. She has a private practice, the Branford-based Therapeutic Life Connection, and she works in-house at several companies and a hospital. Crisci says she recruits business clients by knocking on doors, attending health fairs and through referrals. She says she'll go "anywhere they'll have me."

Watching her work is like watching a dance performance. She strides, turns, twists and lifts your arm and hers in her work. She uses all sides of her hands, arms, and elbows — creating sounds and different textures for the client.

And there are a lot of people out there doing that dance. In February, a new state law required massage therapists to be licensed by the state Department of Health Services. There are currently more than 1,000 licensed massage therapists, outstripping chiropractors, Sager says.

Whether it's the fact that the profession is now licensed or the fact that people are more health- and quality-of-life conscious, the industry is having a bit of a boom.

"I definitely think there's more than a trend there," Sager says of the increase in numbers. Massage therapists are showing up in chiropractors offices, gyms, nursing homes, as well as opening their

own offices and sprouting up in the workplace.

The market for massage therapy can grow rapidly, as it's a portable business — a chair can be carried in an oversized bag and weighs about the same as a bicycle. And a table can be transformed into what looks like a very large brief case — and it doesn't take up much room.

More and more students are looking to make massage therapy their full-time occupation, says Robin Roth, admissions director at the center. She says there are other untapped areas for massage therapy, including work with animals. Massage therapy for horses is already widely used, and house pets could be the next wave, Roth says.

The center, which has been in operation for 13 years, opened a second location in Westport in September 1992. Sager says a total of 400 students graduate each year from the two schools, which is the maximum number.

At the Newington school, housed in two-story building off the Berlin Turnpike, the atmosphere is calming. Crystals, seashells, and smiles abound — as do bottles of Lubriderm lotion for those hard-working hands. And everyone is barefoot. Massage models lie limply on demonstration tables as sentences — so technical they sound like a foreign language — are used to describe rubbing someone's neck.

The 20-month course is not for everyone, says Roth, herself a 1988 graduate. There are classes in anatomy, business preparation, as well as the actual massage classes and outside work that must be completed as part of the 600-classroom hours required.

As part of the center's November 16 open house, visitors can peruse the bookstore, which carries everything from magazines and textbooks to candles and massage tables. Anyone interested in checking out the facility should call 667-1886 to make a reservation.

*Stephanie Riefe*