

spotlight on members



Spotlight on Members gives us the opportunity to hear about what our members are up to today, as well as how they found their way to the NHA Health Program. If you're interested in sharing your own story, we'd love to hear from you. Please email essays of around 500 words, and one or two photos, to info@healthscience.org.

The Power and Potential for Medical Massage Therapy

by Kathy Plaza, West Grove, Pennsylvania

In 1989, recently divorced and looking for a way to support myself, I made the decision to enter the field of medical massage therapy. At that time, I underestimated just how significant this profession was going to be to me. I remember the first day in class: working with the intimacy of another's body was scary and miraculous at the same time. After a few tentative weeks in class, I discovered I really loved it. I remember one day, our instructor said, "Over time I hope you will come to the realization of just what an awesome privilege it is doing this work—work that has the potential to touch the client to a depth that can have such impact on their bodies."

I went on to practice medical massage therapy for 22 years, and soon after I established my practice out of an office built into my home, I discovered what my instructor had meant. Five years into my practice, I had the golden opportunity to take a postgraduate course in gross anatomy at Johns Hopkins University. We would be working on cadavers and discovering anatomy from the inside out. After the memorization of the origins and attachments of every muscle in the body and with years of professional, full-time practice under my belt, I was pretty confident. But once our six-person team began exploring our cadaver, the true miracle of our muscular/skeletal system absolutely amazed me. Connective tissue was something I

hadn't really understood until I started working in it. Now I could grasp how the body tissues work as one big, connected muscle that I had learned as

650 different muscles. When you pull the toe of a flexible, relaxed client you can see how their nose responds to the toe tug!

In my work, I was mostly seeing clients with muscular injuries. When a massage therapist moves lymph and blood into fuller circulation, especially with deep-tissue work, toxins can get kicked up. The therapist can smell outgassing of nicotine, chemotherapy drugs, and the like. My hands would even turn orange from nicotine when I'd work on heavy smokers, and if a client had received chemo, the massage could create a metallic taste in their mouth from the drugs. When a client continues eating a poor diet and practicing unhealthy lifestyle habits, the release of toxins out of the tissues can cause client discomfort that can linger long after the massage, because a lot of the toxins still remain embedded in the fat cells. The next deep-tissue sessions will stir them up again and again. I began to realize that systemic inflammation was at the heart of many injury states, so with the limited understanding of nutrition I had at that time, I would suggest cutting out inflammation-inducing foods, such as dairy and sugary foods.

In 2015, I saw the documentary *Forks Over Knives*. I was now a retired, 68-years-young massage therapist, who over the last few years had slowly gained unwanted pounds, even though I still enjoyed physical activity. I was unable to lose the extra weight with the old dieting methods I had used to control my weight when I was younger. My blood pressure had inched up and had reached 170/110 by this time. Doctors wanted to put me on medication to lower my numbers, but I didn't want to go that route. Watching the documentary gave me hope that I would be able to lower my BP naturally through changing my eating habits. By immersing myself in the *Forks Over Knives* approach and then further tweaking my diet by adopting



Kathy Plaza

Dr. Joel Fuhrman's nutritarian eating plan, I lost 46 pounds, and my blood pressure went down to normal. I found changing my eating program fairly easy once I educated myself by going through all Dr. Fuhrman's books, especially since I've always loved vegetables, fruits, beans, nuts, onions, seeds, and mushrooms—though I did need extra support to overcome my addictions to dark chocolate bars, ice cream, cheese, and some nuts. I was so in love with my new dietary changes and what they had done for my welfare in these golden years that I enrolled in and graduated from Dr. Fuhrman's Nutritarian Education Institute course. I only wish I could have included the information I learned then in my clients' care during my years practicing massage therapy.

When I had my practice, I always did intake information before working on a new client and therefore knew all the medications they were on and what other health conditions, surgeries, and diseases they suffered from. Over the two decades of full-time medical massage, I had clients with surgery scar tissue from mastectomies, knee and hip replacements, lung surgery, diabetes, high blood pressure, autoimmune diseases, cancer, AIDS, colitis, anorexia, etc. How much more effective could I have been had I combined medical massage and nutrition education into one profession? I always thought medical massage and chiropractic should be one profession so that the patient's full health and body picture would be clearer. Now I feel the same about including nutrition



counseling. Of course, then you'd also need to consider how much sleep clients are getting, what kind of stress they are under, their physical activity levels on an ongoing basis, etc. In other words, are they living the lifestyle of good hygiene? What a powerful program of healing that combination would create!

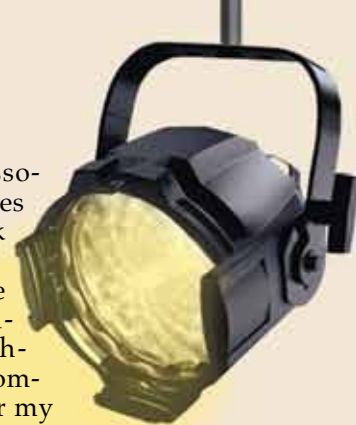
As a hobby, I have been playing bluegrass guitar and fiddle since 2004 with a bunch of musician friends, almost all of whom are overweight or obese and most of whom smoke and drink alcohol. We often play in bars, at festivals, and in restaurants. As a nutritarian, putting myself in these environments affords me stark examples of how I never want to go back to eating like that again! When the friends I play music with watched me lose weight, they became very con-

cerned about my health. I got comments like, "You look so unhealthy now." "I think you're becoming anorexic." "You are such an extremist." "Aren't you afraid you'll blow away?" They'd say this at our bluegrass jam session parties as they were eating cookies, potato chips, fried chicken, and the like. In response, I'd just smile and say that I love eating this way, love the way I look, and now don't have to take medication to keep my blood pressure normal. Because they suffered from high blood pressure, diabetes, and various serious autoimmune diseases, you would think they'd want to know how I do it. But of course, they did not. I can only be the example. I don't get frustrated—instead, I just always bring my own food to the party!

Being a member of the National

Health Association gives me a link with this awesome like-minded, health-focused community for my support system. I

may not be able to meet any NHA members in person or afford to attend the NHA Conference, but through the fantastic magazine and Facebook connections, I definitely feel fully supported. I saved up and joined to become a Life Member because I am committed to a lifetime of healthy eating, and I look forward to a lifetime of support.



Don Schmitz

In 1971, just months after graduating from college, I started experiencing pain and swelling in different areas of my body: first the right shoulder, then the left wrist, and so on. The family doctor thought maybe it was rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and prescribed prednisone. The following year, I moved to a different state and found a new doctor, who suggested I go to the Mayo Clinic to get a definitive diagnosis. At the Mayo Clinic, they confirmed the diagnosis and cautioned me about the dangers of taking prednisone. They suggested I go on gold salt injections and get off the prednisone, which I did over the next six months. Within a year of being on the gold salts, my white blood cell count plummeted to a dangerously low level, and the injections were stopped. I was then prescribed high

Water-Only Fasting Heals Years of Rheumatoid Arthritis Suffering

by Don Schmitz, Lakewood, OH

doses of Motrin (ibuprofen). A couple years later, I found a rheumatologist who changed my meds to aspirin. He later added some prednisone, because 16 aspirin per day wasn't strong enough to handle the pain I was in.

During this whole time, I read everything I could get my hands on concerning RA, including books at health food stores. One of the books I read was *There Is a Cure for Arthritis*, by Paavo Airola, PhD, ND. He wrote about visiting health spas all over Europe and witnessing dramatic improvements in the health of arthritic patients with the use of water-only fasting. He mentioned a fasting retreat in the U.S. near Hyde Park, New York, namely, Pawling Health Manor. In 1980, I called there and was allowed to speak with the doctor, Robert Gross, who told me to expect to stay for at least six weeks. I made the reservation on the spot.

Over a ten-day period, Dr. Gross weaned me off the drugs while building up my system with green juices. I started the water-only fast on the eleventh day. During the first five days, being without pain meds and in great pain, especially in the knees, I had to borrow a set of crutches to be able to

walk the ten feet from the bed to the bathroom. On the sixth day of the fast, I woke up with half the pain gone. That made me a staunch believer in the therapeutic value of fasting. I no longer needed the crutches. I ended up staying for nine weeks and fasting for more than 30 days, and I left Pawling virtually pain-free.

While at Pawling, I learned of the organization that Dr. Gross belonged to and that promoted fasting, the American Natural Hygiene Society (ANHS), which later became the National Health Association (NHA). As soon as I returned to my home, I joined the Society. I went to the 1981 ANHS conference in Hartford, CT, and saw how dedicated the leaders of the organization were. I became a Century Club member for ten years and hence am now a Life member. I wholeheartedly support the educational goals of the NHA and love to attend their conferences (but *not* in Florida in the summer!).

I am eternally grateful that I was able to find relief from the terrible pain I suffered in my 20s. The doctors told me back then that I would end up in a wheelchair. Instead, water-only fasting gave me back my life. 