

Healing Through Touch

Not everyone makes as dramatic an entrance into a massage therapy career as Deana LoGiudice, though transformative experiences inevitably occur during the process of becoming a health-care professional.

Deana LoGiudice was driving home from the movies in her little Volkswagen Golf when she came face-to-face with what appeared to be a disaster. A car coming from the opposite direction trying to pass another car was driving in her lane; the impact of their head-on collision was calculated at 85mph.

LoGiudice's body was crushed as the whole front end of her car crumpled in on her legs and chest. Both of her femurs were shattered, her ribcage and sternum were cracked, both lungs had collapsed, her liver and colon lacerated; she also had multiple contusions and soft tissue injuries, as well as whiplash. Somehow, despite her extensive injuries, she remained conscious until they brought her from the ER into surgery. "I knew if I couldn't breathe I'd die. I tried but nothing happened," she relates calmly, matter-of-factly. "I sat there and decided: Did I want to stay or go? There was so much I wanted to do. But I knew I couldn't do it by myself." So, she said, she prayed for help, and as soon as she finished her thought, she started to breathe. In that moment, she knew she was going to be OK no matter what else happened.

In the months that followed the accident, LoGiudice explored many alternative healing therapies to bring her body back to pre-accident health. And although her body was quickly regaining ground, something at a deeper level had changed irrevocably about Deana LoGiudice. Her experiences with therapeutic massage and energy work especially had a profound impact on her recovery. "That's when I saw that I had to do this for other people. I felt that was the purpose of going through the whole experience—to help other people."

Deana graduated from the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy in Westport in 2002. Five years to the day after her near-fatal accident she gave her first professional massage to a client who had been injured in a head-on collision.

Most people who seek to become massage therapists have a desire to help people. However, they are often surprised to discover how much training and study is required.

Massage therapy students are introduced to the workings of the entire body, not merely the musculoskeletal system, which they must study rigorously. The body's form, or its anatomy, is influenced and affected by the functions of the body, or its physiology. So, massage therapists are required to study the circulatory system, the digestive system, respiratory system and neurological functions of the body—as well as common pathologies and illnesses that they will likely come across in their future clients. The program a student chooses to pursue will determine how many hours of study they will be required to complete successfully as students at the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy. Some programs require a minimum of 650 hours, others over 1,000 hours.

Then, students must pass an examination for National Certification, which qualifies them for Connecticut licensure. To maintain their licensure in Connecticut, and in many other states, massage therapists are required to continue their education throughout their careers, which enables them, like other health-care professionals, to keep up with the many advances taking place in the healing arts.

The applications for massage are broad. It is used to promote relaxation and reduce stress. Research suggests massage can greatly benefit clients with insomnia and can boost their immunity, prevent PMS and much more.

Regardless of whether the prospective massage therapist seeks a career giving relaxation massages in a spa setting, or wishes to work side-by-side with doctors to help in the rehabilitation of patients, he or she will learn how massage affects the entire body at its deepest levels. After all, relaxation itself is a physiological experience, where the body is no longer in stress mode, but in a rest and digest mode that is essential for maintaining health and well being.

Having a solid academic foundation is invaluable to a massage therapist, who needs to know when, and in what manner, massage therapy should or should not be performed. More importantly, massage therapists like Deana LoGiudice are trained to understand the dynamics behind the body's awe-inspiring ability to heal itself, and how to use their therapeutic skills to facilitate that process.