

Review of *Comforting Touch in Dementia and End of Life Care: Take My Hand*

‘What can I do?’ is a question that is often posed by carers of people in the later stages of dementia, particularly at end of life. How can I provide comfort? What can I do to make a connection?

In just under 200 pages, Goldschmidt and van Meines provide us with an answer; and give us step-by-step instructions on how to do it.

This is a clever little book in that it carefully balances the *Eastern* philosophy of the body-energy-spirit system of integrative health care with evidence-based studies focusing on the effectiveness and benefits of hand massage. Goldschmidt and van Meines aren’t afraid to ask us to dig deep and think about what connects us as human beings. We are asked to focus our breathing, centre ourselves, and maintain an awareness of our energy and spirit. But they have also done their homework, and quickly save this book from being too ‘soft’ by providing us with solid evidence from numerous studies that massage therapy – particularly on the hands – can alleviate stress, enhance relaxation, reduce anxiety and lower blood pressure, provide a holistic sense of comfort, and help reduce pain.

‘Touch is the first sense to develop and is a fundamental need throughout our lives.’ This book provides a simple and structured way for caregivers to use touch to provide comfort to a loved one, a friend, or a patient.

Goldschmidt and van Meines quite rightly focus on observing best practice and we are reminded that massage must always be used with caution. Before beginning massage therapy, the reader is encouraged to consult with medical practitioners involved in the receiver’s care and to check for contraindications.

Next the reader is guided through the Elements of a Session, clearly outlining issues to consider such as supplies needed, how to enter the receiver’s personal space and prepare the receiver for a massage and respecting his/her wishes. We are then taken step-by-step through the hand massage sequence, with clear illustrations and descriptions provided. The instructions are simple, practical, and easy to follow. The gentle massage can take up to 30 minutes and the reader is encouraged to carefully observe the receiver to assess the affects of the massage and to react accordingly.

Finally, the book closes by recognizing that illnesses in the elderly – dementia, cancer, heart disease, stroke, and lung disease – may require us to adapt the massage and provides ideas for how to do this. Most importantly, it encourages us to continue to provide that comforting touch – or at least our presence – through to the end of life whenever possible. Goldschmidt and van Meines ask us to ‘remember that your presence makes a difference and that even without touching the dying person, your compassion and concern is of value.’

Take My Hand is a book that we can all use – practitioners, daughters and sons, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers – to provide those we care for with the gift that is free but most valuable: our comforting touch.

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<http://www.dementiauk.org/information-support/books/>