

# Under pressure

Exploring water massage bed technology as an alternative to your LMT.

BY CAROLINE FEENEY



THINKSTOCK

**E**VENING ARRIVES, AND A DOZEN PEOPLE EXPECTING PROMPT treatment pack your waiting room full. On another day, a patient comes in flustered and tense from work, which compromises your ability to perform an adjustment. You can't offer a massage therapy session because your LMT already left for the afternoon. In all of these scenarios, you could benefit from an alternative option to increase patient satisfaction and add flexibility to your schedule.

Perhaps you've tried a water massage bed at a trade show, or seen people standing in line to get their free five minutes. The technology's popularity has taken hold in the practice realm, too. Doctors who invest in the

technology find it to be vital in a chiropractic setting, with patients consistently willing to pay cash. Meanwhile, you can save time and money otherwise spent managing an LMT, effectively manage work flow during busy hours, and provide a consistent means to relax patients prior to an adjustment.

### Rest easy

During a typical session, the patient lies on a full-body cushion as hydro jets beneath the surface provide a heated massage. "It levitates the whole body while the wave moves up from your feet to your head," says Allen Unruh, DC, and owner of A. Unruh Chiropractic in Sioux Falls, South

Dakota. "The patient monitors how much they want, and can regulate the pressure, temperature, speed, and area of the body being treated."

With patients who prefer the privacy and consistency of the bed, the technology can also ease some of your human resources concerns. And considering nearly 50 percent of DCs offer massage as a service, this is an area worth evaluating.

"I would recommend this bed to any doctor who wants to add massage to their practice, without having to add another person," says Damian Scelfo, DC and owner of Carolina Spinal Care and Laser Therapy Center in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Rober Rashid, DC and owner of Middleboro Chiropractic in Middleborough, Massachusetts, refers out to LMTs on a regular basis, but still benefits from both the lower liability and overall costs of the bed. He appreciates never having to worry about a disappointed massage therapy patient. "The therapists, whether they are directly employed by our office or are subcontractors, have a direct effect on patient impressions of the facility," he says. "If the therapist cancels appointments, arrives late, or is just not feeling well that day, the patient experience is lost. Everyone is human and can have a bad day, but to the patient that doesn't matter."

### Cash machine

The bed also has the potential to allow for an influx of patients you simply didn't have the resources to treat before. For an average 15-minute session, doctors can charge between \$15 and \$20. "I see 25 to 30 patients per day, and 95 percent of these patients go on the bed," Scelfo says. "You only have to

do the math to realize that the bed pays for itself very quickly. It brings in about \$500 per day to my practice. This equates to over \$100,000 in extra revenue for my practice per year."

Other factors to consider are time management and the benefits of relaxation prior to an adjustment. This was the case for Michael Savignano, DC and owner of Integrated Medical Center of Florida, who had an LMT unable to work the late shift.

"I use it to kill time," Savignano says. "Sometimes during peak adjusting hours, 4 to 6:30 p.m., I might have 10 patients come in. They can use the hydro bed, and by the time I'm ready for them, they're nice and loose for me to perform an adjustment."

Scelfo uses a similar strategy to stall patients and keep them happy at the same time. "It really helps with office flow," he says.

### Armed with knowledge

Your upfront cost will vary depending on the bed's features, but do some research before making a decision. "I wouldn't just look at the price of the bed," Savignano says. "Talk to a high-volume doctor who's using that specific table. With any piece of equipment, reliability is No. 1." Rashid emphasizes usability for the patient at the forefront: "If it is difficult to understand how to control the bed, most patients will not use it," he says.

Rashid advertises with a large

banner, and on a busy road, this attracts a steady stream of walk-ins. Other marketing strategies might include package deals with bonus sessions, Groupons, or free minutes for new patients.

"It's a staple in my office," Unruh says. "When I first got exposed to it at a trade show, I decided to buy it, and then I learned quickly that people were waiting sometimes a half hour, 45 minutes just to get on it. I thought, 'Oh man alive, I have to get two of these.'" 



Caroline Feeny is the associate editor of *Chiropractic Economics*. She can be reached at [cfeeny@chiroeco.com](mailto:cfeeny@chiroeco.com), 904-567-1559, or through [ChiroEco.com](http://ChiroEco.com).

## HydroMassage: Massage without the therapist

For more than 25 years, HydroMassage beds have been used to provide a convenient form of massage therapy for up to 30 patients per day, without the challenges of hiring or managing additional massage therapists. HydroMassage is typically utilized for 12 to 15 minutes prior to an adjustment or spinal decompression to help with muscle soreness, stiffness, and tension.

Doctors who incorporate HydroMassage in their practice are often frustrated with massage therapists who quit, are difficult to manage, or don't show up on time for appointments. HydroMassage delivers a solution to this problem and also makes massage more affordable and accessible for all patients. Compared to traditional hands-on therapy, HydroMassage treatments are more convenient, as the patient does not have to disrobe, dedicate 60 plus minutes of his or her day, or be touched by a stranger. For those who have not previously received chiropractic care, starting with a warm massage often helps with the stress and anxiety of the initial patient visit, and makes the spinal adjustment easier to perform for the doctor.

Treatments may be customized on the HydroMassage touch screen monitor specifically for each patient's individual needs using 10 different massage pressure levels, four speed settings, 21 temperature settings (85 to 105 degrees), and 30 specific massage points on the body. By allowing the doctor to save and recall prior massages, HydroMassage also provides a consistent level of care that is difficult to replicate with massage therapists. Patient education videos or articles

may also be displayed on the touch screen, and a small promotional window gives the practice the opportunity to advertise other specials or services.



From a business-building perspective, HydroMassage commonly generates \$2,000 to \$6,000 in new monthly revenue, as doctors often charge \$10 to \$20 per session. Because patients enjoy and are eager to return to use HydroMassage, doctors report increases in patient retention and 2 to 5 new patient referrals each month from word of mouth advertising. When financed over the typical 60-month term, the cost of HydroMassage is approximately \$20 to \$25 per day.

HydroMassage provides access to a "customers-only" website that has every piece of professionally designed marketing support collateral available for download. Doctors use this material to advertise, sell gift certificates for HydroMassage during the holiday season, and create membership packages that allow patients to pay a monthly fee to use HydroMassage regularly as a part of a maintenance plan.

 For more information, visit [HydroMassage.com/eco](http://HydroMassage.com/eco).