



Practitioner Support

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Changing the Linens

In the field of energy medicine, circumstances dictate what is appropriate in terms of hygiene and cleanliness. Unlike in the massage profession, there is no standardized hygiene policy in Energy Medicine. Although hygiene encompasses many things, we will discuss linen hygiene in this article. Because clients usually remain fully clothed during a session, many Energy Medicine modalities do not have or teach a specific policy about changing linens between sessions. When we refer to linens, we are referring to all treatment table linens: sheets, head cradle covers, pillowcases, bolster cases, blankets, etc. In most circumstances, common sense hopefully rules. But there are differing opinions on what is appropriate.

Most of us have personal hygiene criteria that effect how we address hygiene in our practice. Some people change bed linens after every houseguest and others feel that if they know the person, the person is family, or they only stayed one night, there is no need to change sheets. Many times blankets and pillows are in use for sometime before they are washed or replaced. Our personal preferences certainly influence our professional consideration and practices.

As Dawn Warnaca, Acting Director of HTPA, says, "I have placed a small bright post-it note on the headboard in the guest room. It says, 'Clean sheets are in the bottom drawer.' This note is intended as a helpful hint to my guests in the

hopes of making my life easier and having the room ready for the next wayfaring arrival. Imagine my surprise one morning, when an overnight guest said to me, 'I slept in clean pajamas, so I didn't change the sheets.' I wondered how my guest might have felt if I had replied with, 'Oh, that's ok, the last couple of people who stayed there felt the same way.'"

With a lack of clear guidelines, what is the most professional and conscientious approach to linens? Sweat and tears are the most common bodily fluids that Energy Medicine practitioners will encounter and they are not considered infectious. But still, there are health and safety concerns that are worth considering in terms of how often we change linens. Massage schools teach a standard of changing sheets for every client. One massage therapist may put on four fitted sheets at a time, only stripping one layer after each client. This saves precious moments in between each massage. Is this the same as changing sheets after each client? Another massage therapist changes the sheets and face cradle after each client, but not the blanket, pillowcase or bolster case. Is this appropriate? An acupuncturist may change the fitted sheet weekly on each treatment table, using fresh paper over the sheet for each client. A Healing Touch practitioner changes the linens that touch a client's head—pillow cases and face cradle covers—after each client, but the fitted sheet only at the end of the day. Is this acceptable? Another Energy Medicine practitioner changes all linens after every client.

If you are aware that your client has a cold, the flu or another transmittable disease, it may make sense to change the linens after their session regardless of whether or not they are fully clothed. If your client is fully clothed but you use a face cradle, it makes sense to use changeable paper protection or change the linen that covers it. In some circumstances changing the blankets after the client may be appropriate. Some practitioners use pillows to protect someone lying on their side and others use bolsters under ankles and knees depending upon the position. Again, common sense is in order for changing coverings for these pieces.

Linens also have a life span. They are usually washed numerous times in a short period. Your professionalism is telegraphed by how your office looks and feels, including the state of your linens.

The location of a session may also influence how we keep our treatment areas clean. A public event such as a health fair may require a different approach than in a private office. The lack of discussion around the health, hygiene or safety of sheets became a reality for Dawn as she began volunteer-



ing at various public events. “One event in particular stands out: a Stand Down for homeless veterans. It was truly a place for homeless men and women who at one time were young members of the military, dedicated to protecting our great nation. In their current circumstances, however, many were in dire need of a shower! Clothing, shoes, socks, hair and even skin showed various signs of neglect. Lice too were noted, and as practitioners, we do not want this pest transmitted from one client to another. It was my responsibility to protect those coming later to my table, as well as accept these men and women exactly as they showed up.”

Chair treatments don’t necessitate switching linens and may be useful for public events. Yet, if the chair has a face cradle, such as for chair massage, changing this linen is a good idea. If a table is used, skipping the sheets entirely and using an antibacterial wipe or spray to clean a table is another way to handle the high volume and quick turnover at public events. Just keep in mind that some people may object to or be allergic to scents or antibacterial wipes.

Good hygiene is important. It is apparent that our standards should be high. Having high standards protects you as well as your client. Awareness and consideration of the circumstances and who you are treating should be paid attention to and may dictate how frequently linens are changed. There is certainly room for discussion among practitioners and by those who teach individual Energy Medicine modalities. €