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CONTACT: Dan Smith
517.788.7800
Jan Jenkins, Publicom, Inc.
517.487.3700/cell 517.898.2858
JanJ@Publicom.com

BAKER COLLEGE OF JACKSON, ALLEGIANCE HEALTH
PARTNER ON CANCER RESEARCH STUDY

Impact of massage therapy during infusion chemotherapy under analysis

JACKSON, Mich. – At the invitation of Allegiance Health, four second-year Baker College of Jackson therapeutic massage students are taking part in research that may eventually help patients during infusion chemotherapy.

The Allegiance Health study is intended to assess if massage therapy performed during infusion chemotherapy offers any benefits to cancer patients. The participating students are Reem Ahmad-Abreu, Tamra Chaney and Kris Putman, of Jackson, and Michelle Swan, of Montgomery.

Al Pheley, Ph.D., Allegiance Health administrative director for the department of research and sponsored programs, is pleased to partner with Baker College of Jackson.

“Involving Baker College was an easy decision because it offers an outstanding massage curriculum right here in Jackson,” said Pheley. “Our partnership allows us to offer this trial, and it provides a unique opportunity for area students to experience the integration of massage and the clinical care of oncology patients. This research offers many benefits to the students, our patients and the future of integrative medicine.”

The study examines the impact of massage therapy during infusion chemotherapy and will involve 80 cancer patients. The Baker College students follow a strict protocol for meeting the patients and for providing massages with predefined

parameters for location, duration and firmness. Patients are asked to complete questionnaires designed to measure anxiety before and after the massage sessions.

“Massage has been studied extensively in oncology patients, but not at the time that chemotherapy is being administered,” said Julia Malfeld, Allegiance Health nurse coordinator for oncology clinical trials. “The chemotherapy process, along with just finding out you have cancer, is incredibly stressful.

“If massage is found to be beneficial during this critical time, it can be a low-cost adjuvant therapy to ease patient anxiety. It is also a wonderful example of integrative medicine, which is strongly supported by Allegiance’s oncology program.”

All four students have committed to participate the entire length of the study, which began in November 2015 and is expected to end in late 2016, even though three students expect to graduate in June 2016 with associate degrees in therapeutic massage. Their commitment includes being available to meet with patients and perform the massages as needed, even on short notice. The students are earning externship credit hours for participating in the study.

“This pioneering, real-world research represents an exceptional opportunity for our massage therapy students and potentially for future chemotherapy patients,” said Jeanne Brickner, LMT, NCTMB, Baker College of Jackson director of the therapeutic massage program. “We look forward to completing the study and learning its important results.”

The participating students agree.

Tamra Chaney said, “I knew massage therapy would address physical pain in a powerful way, but the Allegiance research study may provide information on this tool for helping reduce stress, fear and mental and emotional pain.”

Kris Putman said, “This program is a great way to start in our profession. It is a unique opportunity to provide genuine support for patients that could possibly influence future cancer treatment.”

Pheley, Malfeld and Brickner plan to publish the results of the study in a peer-reviewed medical journal upon completion.

For more information about Baker College of Jackson's therapeutic massage program, contact Dan Smith in the admissions office at daniel.smith@baker.edu or 517.788.7800, or visit www.baker.edu.

The largest private college in Michigan, Baker College is a not-for-profit higher education institution accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. It serves more than 23,000 students on multiple campuses and online. Baker College grants certificates and associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in more than 100 programs across diverse academic fields, including business, health sciences, engineering, information technology, education and human services. An impressive 97 percent of available graduates are employed. Every Baker College graduate receives Lifetime Employment Assistance—free and forever. Baker College is a pioneer in distance education and offers students the option of completing a degree 100 percent online, without ever visiting a campus. For information, visit www.baker.edu or follow Baker College on Twitter, @bakercollege, or on Facebook, www.facebook.com/bakercollege.

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Photo caption

Baker JA-cancer massage 1 & 2 — Assisting Allegiance Health in a cancer research study are second-year Baker College therapeutic massage students, from left, Tamra Chaney and Kris Putman, of Jackson; Michelle Swan, of Montgomery; and Reem Ahmad-Abreu, of Jackson. The research is intended to assess if massage therapy performed during infusion chemotherapy offers any benefits to cancer patients.