

BRUSH MASSAGE.

BY FRANK R. FRY, A.M., M.D.

PROFESSOR OF DISEASES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM, MEDICAL DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, ST. LOUIS, MO.

The use of dry bristle brushes for the purpose of massaging is a simple process, yet after more than three years' constant experience with it I can pronounce it very effective. It also has advantages in many instances over ordinary massage methods which I think warrant me in calling attention to it. It is simple and easily learned, and, therefore, in line with the modern tendency to simplify and not to elaborate any of the methods used in manipulative therapeutics, as massage, hydrotherapy, etc.; the idea being, I think, to reduce them to simple methods as far as possible, which may be comprehended in the ordinary hygienic care of the largest possible number of our patients.

As I have employed it, brush massaging consists in kneading all accessible portions of the body with brushes. The brush is kept in contact with the skin and manipulated with a combined circumductory and creeping movement, and with a varying degree of rapidity and pressure. The dry brush adheres to the skin, drawing with it the superficial structures in a way that can hardly be described, but which is readily discovered on trial. As the amplitude of the different movements depends much on the length of bristle and spring of the brush, the combined or special movement almost imparts itself to the hand of the operator, at least it is easily acquired. Specially constructed brushes are not necessary. From a good assortment of flesh brushes one may always select suitable ones for this purpose. I generally find well-made, leather-back ones the most acceptable. Working regularly with this method the operator soon understands how to graduate it to patients of greater or less sensitiveness, and when to use a soft and when a firm brush. Of course the attending physician should retain an intelligent surveillance; something, by the way, which many of us too often fail to do in placing patients in the hands of masseurs and the like.

It is almost uniformly acceptable to patients, we may say always so when cautiously begun and from day to day increased in force, with a soft, pliable brush to begin with and a more severe one later on. The rapidity with which the skin and muscles gain a tolerance will, I think, surprise those who have not witnessed it. In some instances it has seemed to me almost wonderful. And it is very gratifying indeed to the patients to remark this rapidly increasing capacity on their part to endure a good rubbing of this kind.

One of the advantages of this method to me has been that I have had no trouble in obtaining operators whom I could control and trust, and at the same time bring the benefits of the treatment within the financial range of persons of moderate means. Not infrequently some member of a patient's family gives the daily rub in an efficient manner, after being instructed by some proficient person. This is a great advantage in chronic cases when the continuous employment of massage talent would become a serious drain upon a slender exchequer. On the other hand, a dainty operator with a display of nice looking brushes and a skillful use of them can furnish a seance of thirty to sixty minutes quite to the taste of our most fastidious class of lady lovers of massage. Trained nurse pupils I have found to acquire the process most readily. In one institution in which I have had most of my sanitarium cases in the past three years the nurses have made the brush rubs popular by the excellent manner of administering them. As a rule they like to continue the use of them when they get out into private work, because they notice the beneficial and gratifying effects to their patients.

The method is effectual in the heaviest work for which massage is employed. Several capable and experienced masseuses have found much satisfaction in using the brush in the manner here described, and have told me that they liked it especially in the heaviest work, as, for instance, in reducing fat subjects. On the other hand, when the most gentle manipulations are required, I have been equally pleased with it, for example, in several cases of torticollis and other tics, certain

cases of tabes which could not tolerate ordinary massage, neuralgias, neuritis, etc.

It is an excellent means of relieving lithemic and neurasthenic aches and pains of all descriptions, and especially the neck and back paresthesias, which torment this class of subjects. It is a good daily exercise for the ordinary run of neurasthenics, many using the dry brush upon themselves daily when not situated to have the rub from other hands, which is always much preferable.

It is hardly necessary that I should even briefly indicate the range of cases to which the brush massage is applicable, especially in mentioning it to neurological practitioners, to whom this communication is more particularly addressed, and whom I should like to find employing it, believing they will, in a measure at least, share my own experience with it.