

## **Why I love working with elderly folk**

One of my most loyal customers is an elderly chap called Caleb who now boasts his 95<sup>th</sup> year. I've been treating him for quite a few years and going to see him has become a comfortable ritual for both of us.

He first telephoned me to come and treat his wife Phyllis who sadly passed away last year. I remember very clearly the first treatment I gave her. She was 91 and very poorly, recovering from a bad fall and had developed complications, which Caleb put down to her stay in a convalescent home. As I began the treatment she seemed almost delirious and she cried out mournfully 'What have I done to deserve this'. I was obviously a bit dismayed by this as I was only working very lightly over her feet, gently covering all her systems but by my next visit she had perked up considerably and she then made a very good recovery over the coming months.

I love treating elderly people because they have led such rich and interesting lives and when I visited to treat Phyllis I heard about the cottage where they lived most of their married life together with its wonderful garden, the cherished pets they loved and lost and even about Phyllis's failure to have children which had made them both very sad.

Phyllis enjoyed her treatments for a while but decided she'd had enough. I suggested to Caleb that as he was the one caring for Phyllis so well, looking after her every need, shopping, cooking, rubbing her sore joints and cleaning their small and spotless bungalow, maybe he wanted to have treatments himself. He jumped at the chance. He is a very wise and enlightened old man! He has always looked after himself and swears that his good health is down to good food, plenty of exercise and help from 'the old remedies'. He explained how his father used to have a small book which had a list of common ailments with many different plant remedies and poultices to help cure them. He was very sad that someone had stolen the little book but remembers many of the suggestions and still applies them to this day.

Caleb has told me so many fascinating stories over the years I've been treating him that I'm truly humbled. From his heroic efforts in Malaysia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, where he has medals for bravery, to his loyal service as a stone cutter climbing dangerous stone quarries and blasting them with dynamite! I'm also truly inspired by the wonderful relationship he had with his wife. He seemed to display the understanding of the 'new man', recognising that Phyllis needed her space and her friends as well as his care and careful attention.

When treating elderly people I think it is important to remember that they do have this amazing history and myriad achievements under their belt. When we struggle to communicate with them because their hearing is deteriorating or we find ourselves feeling impatient as they tell us again that 'computers are the bane of our lives; they've ruined everything', it's perhaps too easy to forget the wonderful contributions they have made.

It's not always easy treating the elderly either. They do often like things done in a certain way, hate it if we're late or want to change their day. I would advise keeping to the same routines for working with your elderly person. I think it's also good to remember to be respectful. Caleb has no close relatives so there is no opportunity to liaise with them in more challenging situations which I would recommend. I was very unhappy at the treatment Caleb was receiving from his doctor, and urged him to register with another. However, that is Caleb's decision and I have had to be careful not to interfere and always make sure that I ask him how far he wants me to help rather than assuming I know what's best for him.

Other important points to remember:

- Keep a close check on the elderly person's medication. Their medicines can be numerous and change frequently. The list should be recorded by a health visitor or nurse, so remember to review what they are taking and when.
- Work very gently and sensitively. Elderly feet have done a lot of hard work over the years and they can be tender and sore. Their systems are often compromised by medication and, especially during first treatments, work with close observation and try to get as much feedback as possible.
- Be aware of the position your client is sitting in as you work their feet. They can easily become stiff, uncomfortable and tense. You may have to treat with a shorter session, perhaps moving to their hands for the rest of the treatment.
- With hearing loss be aware that communication may be difficult with your elderly person. Hearing aids can be cumbersome, so your client may choose not to wear them. Keep your language succinct. Some elderly folk may be lip reading so speak directly at them and don't mumble. Use of music during treatments might not work. Ask your client and review your approach to make sure it meets their needs.

I have many elderly clients and find they are very interesting, reliable, appreciative and they respond well to treatment. I must admit that with my own father many miles away and not so open minded Caleb feels like my local 'dad', and each visit is a privilege that I get paid for. What a great job we have!