



Simple Answers Positive Results

By David Kent, LMT, NCTMB

Keeping It Simple Series

Addressing the pain and discomfort associated with trigger points is one of the most common complaints massage therapists deal with in the treatment room. It's not uncommon, for example, to palpate a trigger point in the upper trapezius, sternocleidomastoid or suboccipital muscles that produces a referred phenomenon to a completely different area of the body, such as the head. When trigger points refer into the head the phenomenon is often described as pain, a headache, pressure, tingling and/or numbness. Although clients are often surprised at this phenomenon, most are thrilled when I am able to isolate and treat the trigger point. Occasionally, however, a client might show distress at this discovery and say something like, "I'm all screwed up," "I'm wired wrong" or "I'm weird." In this article, I will share simple solutions for addressing these types of comments in ways that will help empower your clients to have a more positive attitude and take a more proactive approach to their health care.

The mental image we have of ourselves is important, especially when it comes to our health and well-being. I do not want my clients to believe they are "screwed up" or "wired wrong." To help transform this negative mindset, I educate my clients to help them establish a new understanding about the processes taking place inside their bodies. Part of this includes suggesting more appropriate labels to describe what is happening. For example, I might say, "You are not all screwed up or wired wrong; the patterns you are experiencing

are typical of many people with trigger points." Then, as I explain to the patient how trigger points are formed, I simultaneously use laminated trigger point charts to demonstrate the path and the pattern of the trigger points. I always use wet erase marker to circle the trigger point patterns right on the chart.

both the client and the therapist to see and assess the client's posture patterns and identify specific problems, such as a high shoulder or forward-head posture (Image 2). Photos show clients the structural stress placed on their muscles; this also usually corresponds to the presence of trigger points in the same musculature.

Offering a thorough explanation, while using a visual aid, helps the client achieve a greater understanding of the body's physiological reactions and causes of their pain. Additionally, clients who can "see" their problem via a chart or a photograph will not only understand it better; they will also have the knowledge to influence their situation and take an active role in their health care. For more about using visual aids, read my article, "Charting Progress: Visuals for Success," in the February 2008 issue of *Massage Today*, where I share how to integrate visual aids into any massage environment, whether it's a medical, clinical, spa or outcall setting.

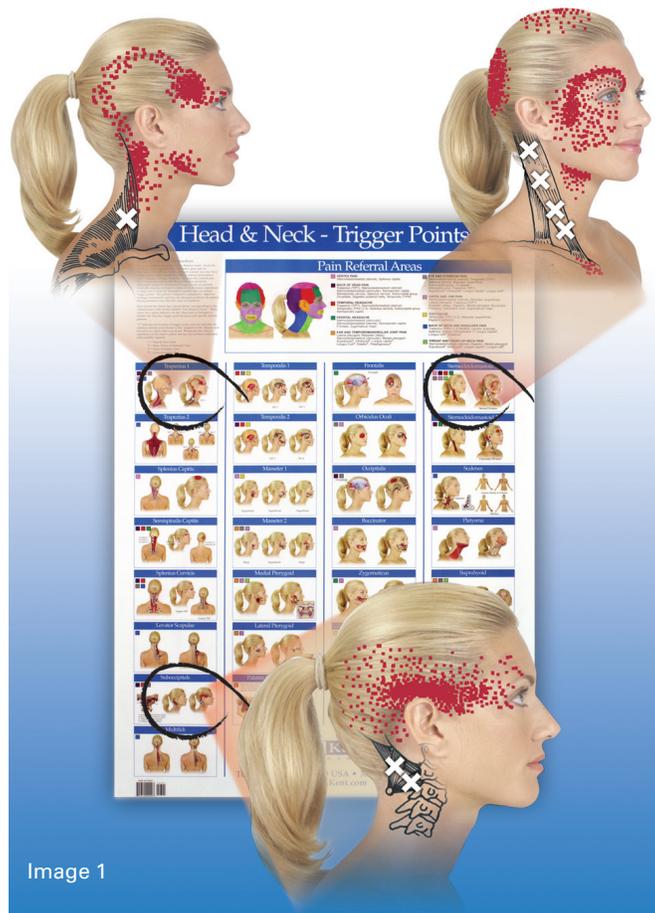


Image 1

Use a wet erase marker to circle the trigger point patterns right on the chart. This helps the client better understand the cause of their pain.

This is an easy method, and the marker can be wiped off using a wet paper towel (Image 1).

Since "a picture is worth a thousand words," postural photos are another useful visual aid. Postural photos allow

both the client and the therapist to see and assess the client's posture patterns and identify specific problems, such as a high shoulder or forward-head posture (Image 2). Photos show clients the structural stress placed on their muscles; this also usually corresponds to the presence of trigger points in the same musculature.

"If you change the belief first, changing the action is easier."¹ A client's negative belief that they are "screwed up"

Simple Solutions for Empowering Your Clients

The next time one of your clients says that they feel "all screwed up" or "wired



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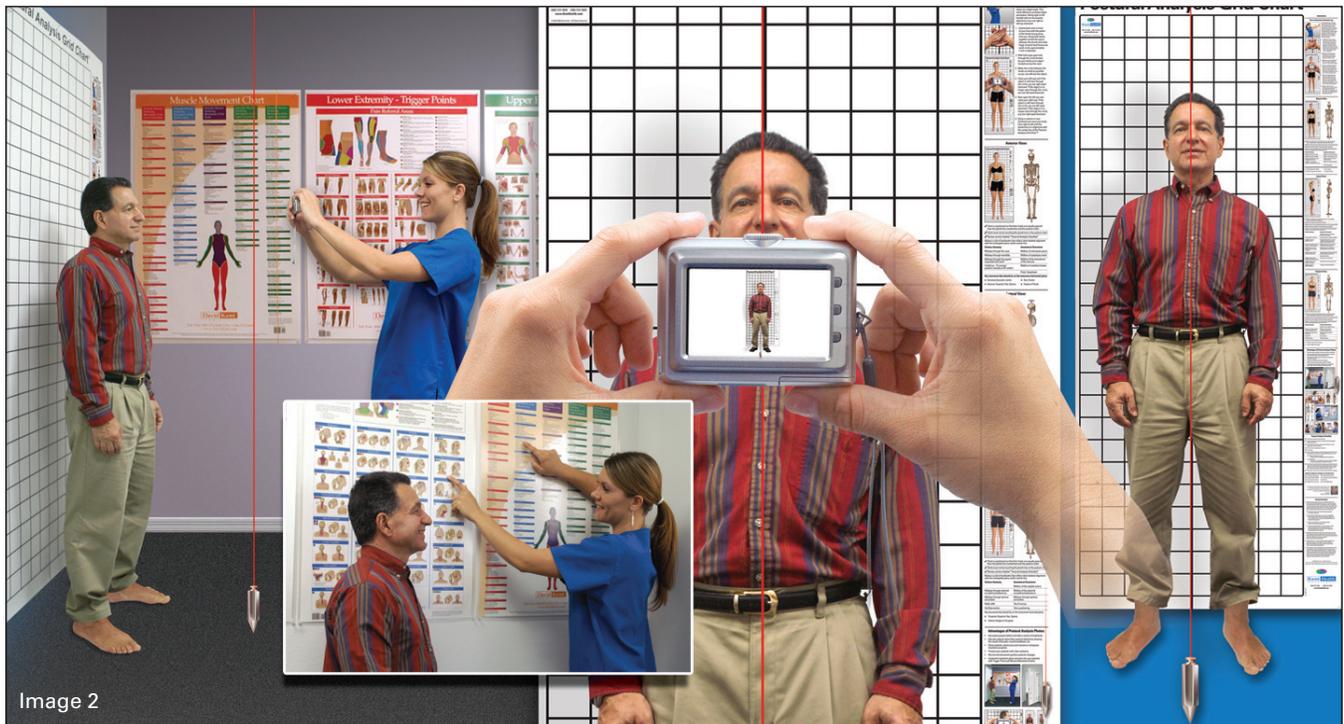


Image 2

- A picture is worth a thousand words. • Document posture before, during and after a series of treatments.
- Educate patients about their Postural distortions, to show the cause of the pain. • Show patients, physicians and insurance companies treatment progress. • Present your patients with clear solutions. • Record and document positive postural changes.
- Customize treatment plans and educate your patients with Trigger Point and Muscle Movement Charts.

reinforces the mindset that “that’s just the way it is.” A more reasonable and appropriate mindset is understanding the origin of trigger points or other sources of pain and how they can be addressed with regular massage therapy, stretching, exercise and a few modifications to their ergonomics at home or work.

“If you believe you can, you probably can. If you believe you won’t, you most assuredly won’t. Belief is the ignition switch that gets you off the launching pad.”² Help launch your client into a new way of thinking. Let them know that there is a correlation between what they think, how they feel and what they can control. Once a client realizes the power they have over their well-being, they will be able to use it for their greater good.

Lastly, create a positive environment and maintain a positive attitude for your

clients. Let your clients know that they are not alone, that many people suffer from conditions similar to theirs and you have successfully helped many before them. While we as massage therapists may clearly understand what a client is experiencing, we can’t assume that the client has the same level of understanding. Remember to communicate openly and with compassion. This can work wonders on a client’s mental outlook and can also help make the client more comfortable in the treatment room.

Obviously, there are going to be situations when we cannot help. Perhaps a client’s condition is structural, too advanced, genetic, etc. In these cases, we just do the best we can by providing the best treatment we know how and educating our clients about the importance of self care like drinking

water, getting quality sleep, eating nutritious foods, exercising, maintaining good posture, and keeping a positive outlook. While we may not be able to help everyone in every situation, those we can help within the scope of our training will sincerely appreciate our efforts.

David Kent, LMT, NCTMB, is a writer, educator and international lecturer specializing in dissection, medical massage and practice building seminars. David, founder and president of Kent Health Systems, is a product innovator and has developed the Postural Analysis Grid Chart, Trigger Point and Muscle Movement Charts, Personalized Essential Office Forms and DVD Programs. His clinic, Muscular Pain Relief Center employs numerous therapists and receives referrals from area hospitals and various medical specialists.

References

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