

In Essence

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A Fragrant Farewell: A Case Study



The journey I took with an elderly client was a time of both learning and wonder, as illness and dementia took hold of her world; I learned just how important touch and smell can be

when working with clients who are slowly losing their hold on the world around them.

Early Days

I met Ms K* (as I called her) – when I began giving treatments at home to her daughter, Carol*, a stressed self-employed, single parent. I had been treating Carol for a couple of years and would always greet Ms K before starting my treatment.

It was only when Ms K's health began to fail that Carol asked me to give a course of treatments to her mother to see if it would help her condition any. Ms K suffered with multiple health issues and her mental faculties had

* Name changed

* Name changed

begun to fail. Ms K was also keen to have treatment; as a woman who had been active all her life, she was quite put out with not being able to get out and about.

The three of us agreed to 6 weekly sessions, after which we would assess the impact of the treatments on Ms K.

Initial Phase: Preparation

I did a bit of homework before actually beginning to work with my new client – I asked Carol what scents her mother liked and was told that lavender, lilly of the valley and lavender were scents she liked. But I also noticed



Nutmeg

that other scents found favour with Ms K too – spicy scents like nutmeg and bay; perhaps they reminded her of her childhood in

Guyana. She also liked citrus scents, such as orange and lemon and enjoyed the floral scents of ylang ylang and neroli (orange blossom).

It was from these oils that I would make up blends (1% concentration, due to the heavy amount of medication being given and to work at the energetic level) in Ms K's treatments. Along with lavender and benzoin (in place of vanilla), I also used (but do not any longer,

sustainable or not) rosewood when confusion or agitation made for very difficult days.

Treatment, “Tapas Style”

Having created a list of oils that could safely be used on Ms K, I would make up blends on the day, based upon what I observed and what Carol would feed back to me. Among the challenges faced by Carol and Ms K’s carers were:

Issue	Oil(s) used
Confusion	Rosemary, Frankincense, Lemon, Rosewood
Agitation	Lavender, Geranium, Ylang Ylang, Angelica, Neroli, Rosewood
Muscle weakness/stiffness	Nutmeg, Rosemary, Bay Frankincense
Anger	Clary Sage, Lavender, Geranium, Orange, Nutmeg
Aggression	Rosewood, Lavender, Ylang Ylang, Geranium

Wherever possible, I would use oils that had multiple properties that were appropriate for the situation before me – I found that working with less truly could be more, especially when working at a more



Ylang Ylang

subtle level.

Treatments were also delivered in various ways:

- Massage – this was only done in the initial weeks; as Ms K became progressively weaker, moving and turning her became too difficult.
- Reflexology – initially done on Ms K's feet, but as she became bed-bound and thus harder for me to work on, I would give hand reflexology sessions.
- Burner – on the days when Ms K was too tired (or asleep) for treatment, I would leave the oil blend for the carers or Carol to use in an electric burner.

Six Week Assessment – and Beyond

After six weeks had passed, Ms K (who was still able to communicate), Carol and I chatted to see how Ms K was feeling. While Ms K could only say that she felt good, Carol reported that Ms K had been able to stand a bit and use her walker (albeit only in her room) and was more alert and verbal. As for me, I often left Ms K drifting off to sleep, a smile on her face.

It was decided that I would continue Ms K's treatments on an ongoing basis; there were good days, and not so

good ones – when confusion would cloud Ms K’s mind and she would become angry, abusive and lash out. The acting out never was directed at me, however; it was Carol who bore the brunt of her angry and sometimes violent behaviour. It was on those days that I did double duty – I would treat both mother and daughter.

During this time I noticed that no matter how confused or blank in mind Ms K was, the moment she smelled one of my blends (which I always presented to her first as her vision was becoming dim) and felt my hands, she would become calm and still. Ms K would simply close her eyes and smile.

A Final Fragrant Farewell

Some months passed; I continued to work with Ms K (now once or twice a month) for another year, during which time it became obvious that she was sinking. Ms K was speaking less and less and finally stopped speaking altogether.



Angelica

Gradually, I too began to fade from Ms K’s vanishing memory and even Carol was finding her mother becoming less and less responsive to her voice and had been transferred to a hospice. However, even at

this late stage of Ms K's illness, she would still react when I spoke to her, turning her head and looking quizzically in my direction, as if trying to recall something...and failing. Nevertheless, when I opened my bottle of oil for her to smell and the scent filled the room (Rose, Angelica and Frankincense – even the nurses kept finding excuses to come in her room!) she closed her eyes and smiled. I gave Ms K what I knew intuitively would be my last treatment; I left the remainder of the oil for the nurses to use in the electric burner in her room.

A few weeks later, Ms K passed away peacefully in her sleep – and I'd like to believe that her journey was accompanied by a cloud of fragrance.

Final Thoughts

It was scent and touch that kept Ms K with us, I believe, far longer than she may have otherwise been; even when memory and speech had gone, the beautiful smile on Ms K's face when she was receiving treatment said it all.

Ms K was an amazing teacher in what was her final illness; I was reminded why I became an aromatherapist – to see and work with the whole person. Ms K reminded me that I needed to see beyond her diagnosis and reach out to the woman who had a strong personality, who laughed, loved and had a deep faith.

That is the woman I worked with and that is who I remember whenever I think of Ms K.