Introduction: In Japan, onsen, or hot springs, has traditionally been associated with good quality natural water baths surrounded by beautiful nature, meals made from local products, hospitality at hot spring hotels, and massage. I would like to introduce Anma massage therapy, the massage technique most widely practiced by nationally certified massage therapists in Japan.

Origin and treatment characteristics: Ancient Chinese medicine, which involves Ankyo, Doin, acupuncture, moxibustion, and herbal medicine was introduced to Japan from China via the Korean Peninsula in the 6th century. Ankyo was a massage therapy that considered acupuncture meridians. Ankyo was modified to meet the preferences of Japanese people and subsequently developed into the modern-day Anma massage therapy. Anma derives its name from its two main manual techniques; an, which is the Japanese term for applying pressure, and ma, the Japanese term for stroking.

Today, Anma massage is generally applied over the whole body, focusing not on meridians but instead on anatomy, especially muscles. Standard Anma massage techniques involve mainly kneading, with lesser amounts of stroking and pressing through clothing using rhythmic massaging motions, and occasionally, brief joint exercises. The intensity of stimulation is adjusted according to each patient’s comfort level.

Results of our studies: We administered a single 40-minute full-body Anma massage session to 15 healthy women. After this session, we observed significantly reduced visual analog scale scores for their subjective symptom of muscle stiffness in the neck and shoulders, state anxiety scores, and salivary cortisol concentrations, as well as significantly increased secretory immunoglobulin A concentrations.

Next, changes in gene expression were investigated to clarify the mechanisms of the clinical effects of Anma massage therapy. Subjects were two healthy female volunteers. Blood was taken before and after a 40-minute Anma massage session and analyzed by microarray. The analysis revealed the gene ontology terms selected by both participants after the Anma massage were “immune response” and “immune system”. Although the sample size was very small, these results imply that Anma massage therapy may affect immune function.

Moreover, in our studies on outpatients with Parkinson’s disease, Anma massage therapy significantly alleviated severity of patients’ subjective symptoms of muscle stiffness, movement difficulties, pain, and fatigue, and also improved motor functions of the upper and lower limbs.

Future challenges in Anma massage research: After completing a preliminary study, we are now conducting a 2-year randomized controlled trial of the efficacy of Anma massage therapy among cancer survivors.

Because Anma is a full-body massage tailored to meet the physical and mental state of...
individuals, it is difficult to develop standardized therapy protocols for studies. However, we aim to incorporate the unique merits of Anma massage into therapy protocols in studies to produce results that are appropriately rigorous for the global scientific community.

**Keywords:** Anma massage therapy, effects, cancer survivors, Parkinson’s disease, gene expression