

Rethinking Oncology Care: A More Inclusive Future for Spas

by **Dara Mullooly, Director of Spa**

For too long, the Spa industry has approached oncology with caution that, while well-intentioned, has sometimes created barriers where there should have been understanding, reassurance and care.

Throughout my career, I have seen how traditional Spa practices can leave people with complex needs feeling that the experience simply isn't designed for them. Not because they don't deserve comfort or relaxation, but because our industry hasn't always had the knowledge, confidence or flexibility to accommodate them.

I believe that needs to change.

A Spa should be a place where people feel welcomed, understood and cared for. Somewhere they can reconnect with themselves and step away, even briefly, from everyday life. These moments can be particularly meaningful for someone navigating an oncology journey.

Yet historically, our industry has often been more comfortable explaining what cannot be offered than exploring what might be possible.

As a Spa Director, I believe we have a responsibility to challenge that thinking. The future of oncology care in Spas should not be defined by limitations, but by knowledge, compassion and a willingness to do things differently.

Moving Beyond Traditional Spa Practices. The Spa industry has evolved enormously, investing in new facilities, treatments and increasingly sophisticated guest experiences. But genuine progress cannot simply be measured by the treatments on a menu or the luxury of our surroundings. It must also be measured by who feels welcome through our doors.

For guests living with or beyond an oncology diagnosis, the smallest details can make the greatest difference. How a conversation is approached. Whether a therapist has the confidence to ask the right questions. The reassurance that an experience can be adapted to individual needs.

These are not simply operational considerations. They are fundamental to making someone feel respected, comfortable and included.

Turning Understanding into Meaningful Change. At The Johnstown Estate, we are putting this philosophy into practice through specialist education, thoughtful consultation and oncology-adapted experiences. Our investment in SATCC oncology training, alongside further specialist therapy qualifications, gives our therapists the knowledge and professional judgement to understand individual needs and recognise when treatments can be safely adapted.



But training alone does not create exceptional care. It is the ability to listen without assumptions, approach sensitive conversations with confidence and recognise when someone needs a different approach that makes the real difference. This thinking is also behind Quiet Moments, an experience combining breathwork, sound therapy and hands-on treatment, guided by individual consultation.

For me, Quiet Moments represents something greater than a treatment. It reflects a belief that the Spa experience should adapt to the person, rather than expecting the person to adapt to the Spa. Whether adjusting pressure, positioning, products or the level of touch, the intention is to create an environment where guests feel comfortable expressing their needs, with choice, dignity and reassurance at the heart of the experience. As industry leaders, we have an opportunity to influence how oncology care develops in the years ahead.

I would like to see specialist oncology education become an established part of therapist development, inclusive consultation embedded in everyday practice, and oncology-adapted experiences recognised as an integral part of modern Spa hospitality rather than an exception.

This requires investment, but more importantly, a shift in mindset. We must move beyond the belief that inclusion is achieved simply by adding a specialist treatment to a menu. Real inclusion is reflected in the culture of a Spa, the confidence of its people, the conversations it encourages and how every guest is made to feel.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month offers an important opportunity to reflect on our progress, but this conversation should never be confined to one month.

The future of oncology care in Spas must be built on a lasting commitment to education, understanding and meaningful change. Having worked within this industry and now being in a position to influence the experiences we create, I believe leadership means questioning established practices and continually raising the standard of care.

Because the most meaningful progress is not always about introducing something new.

Sometimes, it is recognising who has been left out of the experience and having the conviction to change that.

Everyone deserves to feel that there is a place for them. And as an industry, it is our responsibility to make that possible.