

# Complementary and alternative medicine (cam) - massage therapy research paper exa...

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## **Massage Therapy as a Rising Form of Complementary and Alternative Medicine**

Society's increase in awareness of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) techniques can be very visible nowadays. This reflects the growing awareness of people regarding practices related to CAM and also an increased emphasis on promoting health and wellness instead of medically fixing the body when it is already burdened by disease and other ailments. Complementary and alternative medicine is a broad term that encompasses all non-Western medical practices that aim to promote health such as massage, yoga, acupuncture, aromatherapy and other related practices. One of the most popular CAM techniques is massage.

### **Massage History and Important Principles**

Massage has a long standing tradition that dates back to ancient cultures and civilizations. There are many artifacts in ancient Chinese, Greek and other civilizations that suggest that the practice of manipulating muscles, skin and soft tissues have been observed even way back. In many instances, massage has been used because of its recognized effects on relaxation and relief of stress and also its effectiveness in managing a wide range of illnesses that are oftentimes muscular-skeletal in origin.

There are several ways and techniques in doing massage, especially when seen through different cultures and perspectives. The Swedish technique, for example, can be very different from the style of the Chinese and Greek. However, the principle that suggests that external manipulation of body tissues through rubbing, kneading, pressure and other techniques have a

vital and positive effect on body processes applies to most, if not all, of the techniques.

## **Physical and Psychological benefits of massage**

Massage practitioners and their patrons believe that this practice has many desirable physiologic or physical benefits to the body. When properly done, massage can stimulate proper blood flow and provide needed pain relief . Just like other CAM strategies, Western medicine considers these therapies only as a complement or adjunct to an existing medical treatment for selected medical conditions. It is vital for any medical professional who advocates the use of physical manipulation to know that there are certain conditions wherein massage is contraindicated. Examples of such conditions would include conditions that involve aneurysms and embolism because introducing more blood flow in the area where the aneurysm is could dislodge it and cause severe or even fatal reactions, especially when the embolus blocks a major blood vessel after being dislodged. Western medicine guidelines advise caution with the use of these therapies especially if there is a serious underlying medical condition.

Apart from the physiologic benefits of massage, there are also many psychological benefits from undergoing this treatment. Among them are stress relief, relaxation and an overall sense of relief for the tired mind.

## **Massage and the Gate Control Theory of Pain**

The use of massage for various body aches and pains has been widely documented. Many people list pain as the top reason why they seek massage therapy. It is interesting to note that people tend to see massage

and smooth rubbing motions as one of the most effective managements for pain. People rub their forehead during a painful headache and women instinctively try to massage their abdomen during a bout of dysmenorrhea or painful menstruation. Truly, there must be a logical and scientific reason to the use of massage in the relief of pain. The answer can be partly explained through a popular theory in Science known as the Gate control theory of pain.

In this pain theory, the pain phenomenon is seen as the process by which the body interprets danger and pressure signals from the body periphery. The pain impulses or signals are transmitted through specific nerve fibers and are interpreted in the brain as the sensation of pain . Interestingly, rubbing the skin surface and performing a slight massage could close or block off these pain pathways. The act of blocking the pain impulse just like a gate or door is the namesake for the gate control theory of pain. Hence, we get to see the explanation of the medical community on the role of massage against pain.

## **Sports and Massage**

Even in sports, we see various practitioners who support the role of massage. Various athletes are noted to use massage as a way to alleviate pain related to sports injuries. During exercise in preparation for a game or during the game itself, athletes face higher chances of developing strains, sprains and other injuries. The use of massage in this area is proof of the wide acceptance of massage in a wide variety of fields.

## **Massage in Health Care**

Even before the 21st century, people have engaged in massage mainly for its medical benefits. Hippocrates, the father of Medicine, even stated that skill in massage or rubbing of the tissues is a vital skill to learn for any aspiring physician. In ancient Chinese artifacts, there are various drawings and books that suggest massage to aid in many ailments and bodily conditions. It is undeniable that cultures all over the world recognized the skillful use of touch and kneading motions on the skin and muscles as a medical therapy. Nowadays, massage is predominantly used for its effect on health, just like the ancient cultures has perceived them.

Nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, clinics and other health care institutions are the top proponents of this alternative medicine . Patients, especially those who have chronic illnesses that do not respond to mainstream medical treatments, will often choose to undergo massage therapy and other palliative measures instead of undergoing invasive medical procedures. Massage is listed among some of the most effective, safest and least body invasive methods of therapy that are preferred by patients suffering from chronic illnesses. More often than not, these massage therapies are used not for curing the disease itself but for the comforting effects and improvement in overall quality of life that it provides.

## **Role of Massage as a Recreation and Relaxation Tool**

Aside from the people who crave for massage for its physiologic effects against certain diseases, there is also a growing part of the population who seek massage mainly as a relaxation and recreation activity. People who do

not have overt medical conditions go to massage parlors simply because of the fun and relaxation that it provides.

Massage centers have become a huge business prospect in many parts of the world. The creation of massage beds, chairs and other adjuncts to massage therapy gives a clue to the wide consumer base of this CAM strategy. Indeed, massage is fast becoming a profitable business prospect all over the world.

A big number of massage consumers undergo the therapy even with the absence of a real illness or medical condition. This shows that massage is not only seen as a cure for illnesses but as a tool to promote overall wellness and health. This is a proof that people's perspective on massage is dynamic, ever changing and evolving.

## **Looking at the Scientific Evidence for Massage**

The scientific and medical community has long begun to recognize the wide acceptance of massage by the public, not just in the health care industry. There is a growing body and number of literatures that look into the role of massage and quantifying its claims through formal and scientific research process. In order to appreciate this, let us look into three medical journals articles that tackled the topic on massage.

- This is an RCT or a Randomized Controlled Trial about the use of aromatherapy massage technique in a hospice setting by Solen et al.

This 2004 study on massage and aromatherapy techniques have discovered that the use of massage has a significant positive effect on sleep scores and lifting depression among the sample of forty two patients that they subjected

to a weekly massage for four weeks.

- Massage Therapy for Symptom Control: Outcome Study at a Major Cancer Center by Cassileth and Vickers

In a span of three years, 1, 290 patients from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center underwent massage therapy in this research. They found out that massage was significantly helpful in reducing as much as 50% of the uncomfortable symptoms associated with cancer. Even patients on the late stage have reported symptoms of pain relief from massage therapies.

- A Meta-Analysis of Massage Therapy Research by Moyer, Rounds and Hannum

This meta-analysis revealed that chronic back pain sufferers will benefit from regular massage therapy. This study has shown that more significant changes in pain relief were seen with massage combined with acupuncture, exercise and education .

Through these studies, we can form a body of knowledge to know for sure if massage is really safe and effective to be advocated as a CAM technique. Scientific research is encouraged in order to understand how massage works and understand its beneficial effects to the body. The increased interest on research will also reveal problem areas and loopholes on the current practices in the industry. In this manner, we will be able to continually refine massage practice guidelines.

## **Interview with Massage Practitioner**

Conducting an interview session with someone who has experience in administering massage and other physical manipulation techniques in his

medical management is one of the best ways to get a realistic view of the profession. Asking questions that are relevant would enable us to get a sneak peak of what it is really like to be a massage practitioner. All in all, the experience is very enlightening. These people are reliable resources for rich information for anyone who needs or wants to know more about massage. A licensed massage practitioner is in the best position to share first-hand experience regarding the up and downsides to this line of work.

## **The Interview Experience**

The interview experience was scary and intimidating at first. The concept of being up front and sharing views with a licensed professional in massage can be a daunting idea at first. The practice of reading ahead about massage and having questions ready on hand truly helped in creating a smooth interview that fulfilled its purpose. The experience was very pleasant and we learned a lot through the interaction.

## **Significant Learning from the Interview and Research**

Combining interview and research on massage was an effective tool for learning and discovery. Reading through the history and background of massage made me appreciate the importance of this CAM strategy. The readings and researches made me realize that I am letting myself be a part of a respected practice that has been observed for thousands of years. The equipment, name and process of massage may be different but they all have the same end goal: health and wellness for every individual.



## **Surprising Realizations and Perception Changes after the Activity**

After this whole activity, my view on massage became much deeper and more profound. My whole perception on the work of a licensed massage professional was elevated even more during the interview. Reading through the researches also made me understand that there are deeper reasons why we should continue to advocate massage not just because of the monetary compensation but because we want to improve the overall health and wellness of other people. In our hands lie healing powers that can potentially cure pain, alleviate suffering and make lives better through a simple touch.

## **Looking Ahead to Work on this Field**

Indeed, this whole activity prepared me to be a better and more compassionate massage therapist in the future. I now look ahead into building a fruitful and purpose filled career as a massage therapist because of the inspiration and guidance that I found in this activity.

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