The Role of Massage Therapy in Integrative Pain Management:
Mitigating the Overuse of Opioids

Massage therapy is a well-accepted nonpharmacological therapy for managing pain, including a variety of specific chronic pain issues. It should be an important element of governmental guidelines for alternatives to opioids, as it already is recognized by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and included in nonpharmacological pain guidelines issued by The Joint Commission, as well as the American College of Physicians (ACP). It is specifically mentioned in guidelines for opioids alternatives by the Attorney General of West Virginia; and it is referenced in a September 18, 2017 letter from 37 State Attorneys General to the President and CEO of America’s Health Insurance Plans, which encourages insurance coverage of alternatives to opioids.

Existing Clinical Recommendations – Massage for Pain

**The Joint Commission** – “Nonpharmacologic strategies: physical modalities (for example, acupuncture therapy, chiropractic therapy, osteopathic manipulative treatment, massage therapy, and physical therapy) relaxation therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy...”
Joint Commission Perspectives, Volume 34, Number 11, November 2014, pp. 11-11(1).
Clarification to Standard PC.01.02.07.

**American College of Physicians** – “Recommendation 1: Given that most patients with acute or subacute low back pain improve over time regardless of treatment, clinicians and patients should select nonpharmacologic treatment with superficial heat (moderate-quality evidence), massage, acupuncture, or spinal manipulation (low-quality evidence).”

**Federation of State Medical Boards** – “The treatment plan may contain information supporting the selection of therapies, both pharmacologic (medications other than opioids to include anti-inflammatories, acetaminophen, and selected antidepressants and anticonvulsants) interventional, and non-pharmacologic therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy, massage, exercise, multimodal pain treatment, and osteopathic manipulative treatment. The plan should document any further diagnostic evaluations, consultations or referrals, or additional therapies that have been considered to the extent they are available.”
https://www.fsmb.org/Media/Default/PDF/Advocacy/Opioid%20Guidelines%20As%20Adopted%20April%202017_FINAL.pdf
State of West Virginia Guidelines for Alternatives to Opioids

“That’s why my office created the first substance abuse fighting unit by an Attorney General in West Virginia. It promotes a focused effort on enforcement, prevention through education and the pursuit of alternative treatments for injury or pain. Massage therapy has proven effective in the short-term management of pain, particularly pain isolated to one area of the body such as the lower back or neck.” --West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. Painkiller Alternatives May Reduce Risk of Prescription Opioid Abuse. May 12, 2017. West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey. Best Practices for Prescribing Opioids in West Virginia. May 2017.

Attorneys General Call to Action for America’s Health Insurance Plans (AHIP)

“When patients seek treatment for any of the myriad conditions that cause chronic pain, doctors should be encouraged to explore and prescribe effective non-opioid alternatives, ranging from non-opioid medications (such as NSAIDs) to physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, and chiropractic care.”

Consumer Use of Massage Therapy for Pain

A national consumer survey commissioned by the American Massage Therapy Association in July 2016 confirmed a trend over the last ten years that consumers seek massage therapy for pain relief. Among those surveyed who had received a massage in the previous 12 months, 23% did so for pain relief/pain management, 11% for soreness/stiffness/spasms and 12% for injury recovery/rehabilitation. American Massage Therapy Association Consumer Survey July 2016.

Research Highlights: Massage Therapy for Pain

Research on the benefits of massage therapy for various types of pain continues to grow.


https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Real-World+Massage+Therapy+Produces+Meaningful+Effectiveness+Signal+for+Primary+Care+Patients+with+Chronic+Low+Back+Pain%3A+Results+of+a+Repeated+Measures+Cohort+Study


K. Tick, H; Nielsen, A; Pelletier, K; Bonakdar, R; Simmons, S; Glick, R; Ratner, E; Lemmon, R; Wayne, P; Zador, V; The Pain Task Force of the Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health. Evidence-Based Nonpharmacologic Strategies for Comprehensive Pain Care – The Consortium Pain Task Force White Paper. January 2018.
https://gallery.mailchimp.com/7ac0d7f698c857f07706d8259/files/96f671e3-53a2-4c76-8d7a-e4c1a68761f3/Evidence_Based_Nonpharmacologic_Strategies_for_Comprehensive_Pain_Care_White_Paper.pdf

About AMTA
The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), the most respected name in the massage therapy profession, is the largest non-profit, professional association serving massage therapists, massage students and massage schools. Established in 1943 and numbering more than 80,000 members, AMTA works to advance the profession through ethics and standards, the promotion of fair and consistent licensing of massage therapists in all states, and public education on the benefits of massage.