

## Background

Massage therapy is working to gain acceptance in today's conventional healthcare model. There is a growing body of literature that argues the benefits of massage therapy for a variety of health problems including, but not limited to, back pain,<sup>1</sup> migraine headaches,<sup>2</sup> cancer symptoms,<sup>3</sup> depression and sleep disorders.<sup>4</sup>

Massage therapy is one form of complementary and integrative health (CIH) but many barriers exist that prohibit the full integration of CIH into conventional medical care. First, primary care providers receive a lack of education that regarding CIH therapies and uses.<sup>5</sup> This lack of education and training reduces physician confidence in recommending CIH to their patients.

One way to address this education barrier with respect to massage thereapy, is to find out more about the type of health care providers that do recommend massage. It is suggested that providers create a working relationship with trusted CIH practitioners in the community to set a foundation for the integration of CIH therapies into conventional medicine.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, there is a communication barrier between primary care providers and patients. A systematic review examined patients' reasons for not disclosing their use of CIH therapies to their primary care provider. They found that patients reported non-disclosure rates of CIH that ranged between 23% and 72%, with lower rates of disclosure among patients who were being treated by a provider that was not familiar with CIH.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to understand why patients do not disclose CIH use to primary care providers because communication about CIH improves the patient-provider relationship.<sup>8</sup> Creating open communication between patients and providers is vital step towards the integration CIH, including massage therapy, into conventional healthcare.<sup>6</sup>

## Objectives

1. Investigate how many of those who seek massage are recommended for massage by a provider.
2. Determine which health care provider specialties are more likely to recommend patients for massage therapy.
3. Understand the reasons why patients do not discuss their use of massage therapy with their healthcare provider.

## Methods

The Card Study Method is used by many practice-based research networks to quickly collect a small amount of observational data during the course of routine practice. The Provider Recommendation for Massage card study questions were developed by the Massage Northern Ohio Practice-Based Research Network (MNO-PBRN) steering committee with guidance from a clinical research facilitator from PBRN Shared Resource. The card was then reviewed by members of MNO-PBRN. The card consisted of 6 multi-part questions.

Participation in the card study was open to any active licensed massage therapist (LMT) member of MNO-PBRN. Data collection included each LMT filling out up to 20 data collection cards with de-identified data immediately after eligible patient visits as part of their routine charting. The completed cards were returned to study staff in a pre-paid envelope.

Survey collection took place over a two month period following initial deployment. LMTs were able to decide when it was best for them to begin collecting cards in their own practice during the two month period. However, once they began collection they were to complete the 20 cards on consecutive patients to avoid selection bias. LMTs did not fill out more than one card per patient, even if they saw that patient more than once during the collection period.

Healthcare Provider Recommendation for Massage Therapy Card Study			
1. New patient	Yes	No	
2. Gender of Patient	Female	Male	Other
3. Reason for visit (General Massage or write in specific reason)	General Massage		OR
	Specific Reason _____		
4. Does the patient tell his/her primary care provider that they use massage therapy?	Yes	No	
4a. If No, Why <u>not</u> ?	Fear of negative response		
	Physician did not ask		
	Physician does not need to know		
	Did not occur to patient		
	Other _____		
4b. Did the patient indicate that it would be easier to talk with the PCP if they had information to give the doctor about the health benefits of massage?	Yes	No	

5. Did patient sign a release to allow you to give information to their healthcare provider?	Yes	No	Practice doesn't use release forms
6. Did a healthcare provider recommend the patient for today's massage?	Yes	No	
6a. If Yes, What type of provider? (circle one)	Primary Care	Orthopedist	
	Internist	Neurologist	
	Rheumatologist	Psychiatrist	
	Palliative care	Migraine specialist	
	Other _____		
6b. If no, has the patient <u>ever</u> had a health care provider recommend them for a massage in the past?	Yes	No	
If Yes to 6b, in the past, What type of provider? (circle one)	Primary Care	Orthopedist	
	Internist	Neurologist	
	Rheumatologist	Psychiatrist	
	Palliative care	Migraine specialist	
	Other _____		

## Results

Table 1: Characteristics of Patients and Visits with LMT

Total visits (n=403)	
Gender n (% Female)	403(65.3)
New patient n (% yes)	403(25.0)
Reason for visit n (% Specific Reason)	401(65.1)
If specific, what reason?	
Muscular-Skeletal Pain n (% yes)	255(49.9)
Chronic Disorder n (% yes)	255(7.9)
Nerve/Neurological Pain n (% yes)	255(3.5)
Other n (% yes)	255(2.0)
Does patient tell primary care provider they use massage n (% yes)	399(50.6)
If no, why not	
Fear of negative response n (% yes)	189(1.6)
Physician did not ask n (% yes)	189(15.9)
Physician does not need to know n (% yes)	189(9.0)
Did not occur to patient to tell PCP n (% yes)	189(72.5)
Other Reasons n (% yes)	189(11.1)
Does the practice use release forms? n (% yes)	400(58.5)
If yes, did the patient sign a release form n (% yes)	234(30.3)
Did patient indicate it would be easier to talk to PCP if they had information about the benefits of massage therapy? n (% yes)	327(16.5)
Did a health care provider recommend patient for today's massage? n (% yes)	399(23.3)
If yes, what type of provider?	
Primary Care Provider n (% yes)	93(38.7)
Orthopedist n (% yes)	93(19.4)
Rheumatologist n (% yes)	93(5.4)
Neurologist n (% yes)	93(5.4)
Internist n (% yes)	93(4.3)
Palliative Care n (% yes)	93(2.2)
Other practitioner n (% yes)	93(48.4)
If no, has a provided ever recommended massage in the past? n (% yes)	300 (39.7)

When asked if the massage therapy patients told their providers that they use massage, new patients were significantly less likely to tell their provider that they use massage versus established patients  $\chi^2(1) = 19.191, p < .001$  and patients seeking massage for a specific problem were significantly more likely to tell their providers than patients seeking massage for general relaxation.  $\chi^2(1) = 9.152, p < .05$ .

Also, when asked if patients were recommended for today's massage by their provider, patients seeking massage for a specific problem were significantly more likely to be recommended for today's massage by a provider than patients seeking massage for general relaxation.  $\chi^2(1) = 25.085, p < .001$ .

There were significant associations between type of visit, general massage or massage for a specific condition, and whether or not the patient indicated that it would be easier to talk to their provider if they had information about the benefits of massage therapy and when available, whether or not the patient signed a release of information.

## Discussion

Among 403 visits, massotherapists, 51% of patients had told their primary care clinician about seeing a massotherapist, and for 23%, a health care provider had recommended visiting a massotherapist for that visit. Patients who told their primary care provider that they use massage therapy were more likely to be established patients, or to be seen for chronic or neurological complaints. Visits recommended by a physician were more likely to be for chronic conditions.

## Conclusion

Patients who are established in the massage therapy practice and those receiving massage for a specific condition are more likely to tell their primary care provider that they use massage and those seeking massage for a specific reason are also more likely to have been recommended for massage by a healthcare provider. This information will help LMTs target and inform patients about the importance of talking with their healthcare providers about their use of massage and provide LMTs with a starting point of which types of health care providers already recommend massage which will further dialoged about the integration of massage in conventional healthcare.

## References

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