TAO Activity #1

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**Alternative Medical Treatment Topic:** Massage Therapy

**Title of research article chosen:** Massage therapy has short-term benefits for people with common musculoskeletal disorders compared to no treatment: a systematic review.

**Date of the article:** July 2015

**Type of study (Qualitative/Quantitative):** Quantitative systematic review

**Purpose of the study:** To determine the effectiveness of massage therapy

**Research question(s)**: Is massage therapy effective for people with musculoskeletal disorders compared to any other treatment or no treatment?

**Study population/ sample size:** People with musculoskeletal disorders (2565 individuals)

**What was studied in the article? What is the article about?** Bervoets, Luijsterburg, Alessie, Buijs, and Verhagen’s (2015) article is a systematic review of previously performed trials regarding massage therapy on patients with chronic back, shoulder, neck, and other pain. Some of the studies used placebos to act as the no-treatment comparison while others paired massage with other procedures like acupuncture. Pain (measured on a scale of 0-100) and function (measured on a scale of 0-24; 24 meaning low function) were the main components assessed while range of motion, muscle tension, and muscle stiffness were other factors assessed.

**Findings:** Eliminating studies that had high risks of bias: on average, with no treatment other than massage therapy, shoulder pain scores decreased by 16 and knee pain decreased by 19. Regarding average function change, individuals with shoulder pain’s function score decreased by 1.5, low back pain scores decreased by 2.5, and knee pain scores decreased by 13 (Bervoets et al., 2015).

**Conclusion based on Findings and Article Discussion**: Massages reduce pain and improves function compared to no treatment for some areas (shoulder pain and osteoarthritis of the knee); there is some evidence that for solving pain, acupuncture is better than massage, joint mobilisation is worse, and manipulation/relaxation therapy is the same (Bervoets et al., 2015).

**Relevance to my learning and practice/clinical area:**

Knowing that massages help reduce pain for individuals with musculoskeletal disorders, I can incorporate massage into my nursing actions. For example, when giving a bed bath to a patient who is pregnant, stressed, or has a musculoskeletal disorder, I can provide a small massage to reduce pain and increase function in the low back, neck, shoulder, and the knee (Bervoets et al., 2015). While massage therapy’s specific mechanisms of action are undetermined at the moment, Bervoets et al. (2015) state that some of the proven benefits of massage are: increased lymph flow and parasympathetic response, fibrosis prevention, increased clearance of blood lactate, and positive effects on mood and pain. While as a nurse, I may not have as much knowledge as someone who specializes in massage therapy, I can use basic movements to accomplish massage’s effects. Bervoets et al. (2015) explain that massage is a combination of rhythmical hand/finger techniques such as sliding, squeezing, kneading, striking, pressing, and vibrating. I can perform these actions and assess my patient’s comfort throughout care to ensure the pain level is being managed appropriately and the patient is relaxed.

**APA Reference for Journal Article:**

Bervoets, D., Luijsterburg, P., Alessie, J., Buijs, M., & Verhagen, A. (2015). Massage therapy has short-term benefits for people with common musculoskeletal disorders compared to no treatment: a systematic review. *Journal of Physiotherapy, 61*(3), 106-16. doi:10.1016/j.jphys.2015.05.018.