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ABSTRACT

A Comparison of Manual Treatments for Cervical Sprain and Strain

Neck pain and dysfunction are common and can limit a person's ability to participate in normal daily activities. Massage is widely used to treat neck pain. Yet, a 2006 Cochrane review of massage for mechanical neck pain found that neither massage alone nor in combination with other treatments showed any significant advantage over other comparison groups (Haraldsson). Subsequent analysis demonstrated the studies to be poorly designed, and no firm conclusions could be drawn regarding the effectiveness of massage for improving neck pain. The Cochrane Collaboration called for pilot studies to characterize and examine the effect of massage alone or as part of a multimodal intervention. Furthermore, evidence is building to support the use of manual therapy and exercise for mechanical neck pain (Walker).

This pilot research will compare treatment of cervical neck sprain and strain with neuromuscular massage therapy (NMT) alone, Active Isolated Stretching (AIS) alone, and a combination of NMT and AIS. The combined treatment has shown promise in a rehabilitation setting. Preliminary assessment of a small cohort of 110 patients with diagnosed neck sprain or strain who visited QuistMD - The Flexibility, Sports, and Rehabilitation Clinic in 2009 revealed positive outcomes. Research is warranted to confirm these results. The proposed pilot will be directed by an osteopathic physiatrist, who will supervise the treatment conducted by licensed massage therapists. Patients will be recruited from the population attending QuistMD - The Flexibility, Sports, and Rehabilitation Clinic who present with a chief complaint of neck sprain or strain.

The study is funded by and well-aligned with the mission of the Muscular Therapy Institute Foundation (MTIF) to promote the health of the community and to advance the practice of massage therapy. A better understanding of the effectiveness of manual therapies to address musculoskeletal conditions will deepen the scientific understanding of the benefits of massage therapy alone and in combination. Findings will contribute to the expanding body of literature examining the incorporation of an integrative approach in medical settings for common musculoskeletal conditions. This research will also direct the educational curriculum for massage therapists.