

# The Importance of Research

**As massage continues its trend of mainstream integration, the importance of "homegrown" research can't be overlooked.**

*By Kathryn Feather, Managing Editor*

*Taken From: <http://www.massagetoday.com/mpacms/mt/article.php?id=13811>*

The massage and bodywork profession has experienced tremendous growth in recent years. Qualified therapists truly are making their presence known in hospitals, rehabilitation centers, retirement communities, spas and the world of professional sports and theater. Therapeutic and noninvasive in nature, more and more individuals – both men and women – are looking to massage to relieve a variety of health issues from back and neck pain to headaches and stress relief. No longer just a luxury, consumers are making massage a part of their health care regimen.

According to the most recent AMTA consumer survey, almost one in five adult Americans (19 percent) report discussing massage therapy with their doctors or health care providers; of those 19 percent, more than half (58 percent) said their doctor strongly recommended or encouraged it; and more than half of massage therapists (63 percent) receive referrals from other health care professionals.



This could prove to be an important trend. As the baby boomer population looks to extend their active lifestyles, massage has the opportunity to become a major component in the health care of aging America. However, this also leads to some interesting questions regarding the future of the profession. How do consumers know when to use massage therapy as an option? More importantly, when do health care professionals know to recommend massage to a patient?

The answer to both of these questions lies in research. More research into the effectiveness of massage can educate both the public and mainstream medicine, which can then lead to more referrals and more business for individual therapists.

The Massage Therapy Foundation recognizes the value of massage research and has provided support for such projects through conferences, funding and educational resources. Recently, the foundation announced the launch of a peer-reviewed journal, the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork: Research Education & Practice*. The journal has the potential to open up several doors for the profession in terms of providing a forum for the discussion and presentation of valuable research.

Several organizations also have provided financial assistance to the foundation's efforts for more research. In the fall of 2007, ABMP presented the foundation with a \$10,000 grant in support of research, as well as making the lead grant of \$15,000 to help gain medical recognition of massage therapy as a treatment for low back pain. The latter gift represented one-fourth of the funds needed to advance a review under the auspices of the

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Medical Applications of Research. The NCBTMB recently donated \$50,000 to the foundation's research efforts.

The AMTA has been providing financial support to the foundation since its inception in 1990. In fiscal year 2007-2008, the AMTA donated a total of \$383,809 and in fiscal year 2008-2009, it donated a total of \$494,229 in both cash grants and in-kind donated services.

"AMTA remains committed to supporting scientific research on the use, safety and efficacy of therapeutic massage. We look forward to massage therapy practice being informed by an expanding body of quality research. The Massage Therapy Foundation is a valuable source for research information and AMTA is proud of its financial support of the Foundation's work," says AMTA President M.K. Brennan.

"The AMTA and the Massage Therapy Foundation share an interest in advancing the massage therapy profession through evidence-informed scientific research, research literacy and research capacity. As a core funder of the Foundation, AMTA is acting on its mission to serve our members while advancing the art, science and practice of massage therapy," adds Glenath Moyle, AMTA representative to the Massage Therapy Foundation and member of the foundation board of trustees.

An argument certainly can be made that research has helped advance the profession. Evidence of this can be found in the increase in therapists hired at hospitals utilizing massage for both inpatient and outpatient services. According to the AMTA consumer survey, the number of hospitals offering massage therapy has increased by 30 percent in two years (from 2004 to 2006); of the hospitals that have massage therapy programs, 71 percent indicate they offer massage for patient stress management and comfort, while more than two-thirds (67 percent) utilize massage for pain management; and 67 percent of hospitals with massage therapy programs offer massage to their staff for stress management. The consumer survey also found that more than half of adult Americans (59 percent) would like to see their insurance cover massage therapy.

The Touch Research Institute also provides relevant research to the public and the massage profession. Director Tiffany Field, PhD, shared the two most current projects TRI is working on: massage therapy to prevent prematurity, and massage therapy to increase bone density and growth in preterm infants. "We need to continue conducting underlying mechanism studies to persuade the medical community and the insurance companies that every pregnant woman needs massage and every preemie needs massage," said Dr. Field.

The current trend in research these days is that findings must be evidence-based. This can sometimes cause conflict within the profession, as many see massage as a fluid process that changes as the needs of the client change during a session. Those in allopathic medicine might not understand this argument, as they generally look only at the hard data to determine their opinions and recommendations.

It's important to recognize that massage therapy is not the only profession to experience this gap in clinical understanding. Chiropractic was in this same position in the 1970s and, to some degree, acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine faces this dilemma as well. So, how does the massage profession bridge this communication gap?

With the forward momentum of this research trend, it might be time to take a page out of the chiropractic playbook and learn to speak the clinical language so popular with allopathic medicine. With more and more consumers finding their research on the Internet, it might be the right time for a digital repository for massage research. As more consumers become armed with this relevant, research-backed information, it will become increasingly difficult for their general practitioners to discount the relevance of massage therapy to a patient's health and well-being. Therapists already know massage is much safer and less invasive than prescription drugs or surgery.

What would the profession look like if MDs, public health officials, biologists and chemists became certified massage therapists and began incorporating massage modalities into their research on cancer, heart disease, stroke and chronic pain? What if more and more therapists advanced their education and incorporated massage and bodywork into their postsecondary educational goals? Could working with the NIH and receiving sought-after grant money be far behind?

As more "homegrown," evidence-based research becomes available to the general public and to the mainstream medical community, consumers are going to demand the best health care they can get their hands on. Wouldn't it be great if massage therapy was near the top of the list?

For more information about the Massage Therapy Foundation and the Touch Research Institute, visit [www.massagetherapyfoundation.org](http://www.massagetherapyfoundation.org) and [www.miami.edu/touch-research](http://www.miami.edu/touch-research).