



# MTABC Student Scholarship Award

West Coast College of Massage Therapy

February 28, 2012

## Sky Tait

The Significance of Research to Massage Therapy

Research is an important influence upon the future of massage therapy. By testing the efficacy of techniques or treatments for specific conditions, which methods safely achieve the greatest benefit can be more reliably ascertained. The credibility that peer reviewed research studies provide illustrates to other medical professionals the effect that massage therapy may have with their patients. Research also impacts how governmental organizations view massage therapy, informing decisions regarding policy. Essentially, research can determine how massage is applied, why others endorse massage therapists, and who has access to massage therapy.

Without methodically testing a form of treatment, one must rely on theoretical hypothesizing and collective observations of therapists and patients to determine an intervention's true effect(s). Since the therapist and patient are too biased to make ambivalent observations regarding the intervention, the involvement of a third-party observer improves the validity of findings. By further honing the reliability of observations through research protocols such as control groups, blinding procedures, results of different approaches to treatment may be statistically compared with greater consistency. For example, the findings of a study on the pressure used in massage therapy on pre-term infants' weight gain (Fields, et al., 2006) demonstrates how research can determine an intervention's effects. Moderate pressure treatments were found to encourage greater weight gain in the infants, influencing how parents and massage therapists alike treat preterm infants.

Though much progress has been made towards the integration of massage therapy into medical practice, many physicians still have minimal knowledge of massage therapy. Without research being grounded in sound methodology and documentation, findings are likely to be overlooked by medical professionals, who are often inundated with research claims. As noted by Verhoef and Page (1998), a positive correlation has been found between physicians' knowledge

of massage therapy and the likelihood of the physician making referrals to massage therapists. Valid research is one of the foremost ways that medical professionals can be convinced of the value of massage therapy.

Another way that research has the potential to advocate massage therapy on a massive scale is by exhibiting to government and legal organizations the benefits that massage therapy can contribute to health care. Health Canada, for example, reports that making key decisions "...depends on science and research..."(Health Canada, 2011, Importance of Science and Research, para. 3). If Health Canada were to become convinced of the value of massage therapy to public health through valid research, a national policy for massage therapy coverage could potentially be effected. Within B.C., massage research was reviewed by WorksafeBC's Senior Medical Advisor Dr. Craig W Martin (2003), demonstrating to policy-makers the value of massage therapy coverage for those injured on the job. With research compelling enough to gain the attention of medical advisors and policy-makers, changes can be made to the coverage provided for massage therapy services provincially and nationally.

In determining the future of massage therapy as a profession it is not only the volume of research that will influence how others view massage therapy, but the quality, validity and applicability of that research. As of 2008, it was estimated that an average of 50,000 articles are added each month to PubMed alone (A. Irene Gamalski, 2008). Among this deluge of research, studies that can stand up to peer scrutiny are more likely to be fully read and shared with others. A reputable research review can make the difference between a study being balked at or being accepted and shared among communities of medical professionals. Therefore, even a relatively small number of well executed and documented research studies may have a significant impact upon the future of massage therapy.

Reference List

Field, Tiffany, Diego, Miguel A., Hernandez-Reif, Maria, Deeds, Osvelia, & Figuereido, Barbara (November 2006). *Moderate Versus Light Pressure Massage Therapy Leads to Greater Weight Gain in Preterm Infants*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1821345>

Gamalski, A. Irene (2008). *An Evaluation of Health Research Methodology in the Literature*. Retrieved from <http://commons.emich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1145&context=honors>

Health Canada (2011). *Importance of Science and Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/sr-sr/about-apropos/importance/index-eng.php>

Martin, Dr. Craig W (2003). *Massage Therapy: A Quick Review On the Available Evidence*. Retrieved from [http://www.worksafebc.com/health\\_care\\_providers/Assets/PDF/massage-therapy-evidence.pdf](http://www.worksafebc.com/health_care_providers/Assets/PDF/massage-therapy-evidence.pdf)

Verhoef, MJ & Page, SA (1998) *Physicians' Perspectives On Massage Therapy*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9612587>