

Massage Therapy

Background

Massage therapy is the application of a variety of manual techniques that involve soft tissue manipulation and includes holding, causing movement, or applying pressure to the body.

History

Massage has been used informally to address pain and stress for centuries, but it was only in the early 1980's that it became a legally recognized profession in the United States with well-developed training standards and licensing requirements. It is now accepted as an important adjunctive therapy for the management of a variety of conditions, most notably chronic pain and stress.

Theory and Philosophy

A massage therapist focuses on the normalization of soft tissues affected by stress, injury, and illness through the use of manual techniques that may improve circulation, enhance muscular relaxation, relieve pain, reduce stress, and promote health and well-being. There are a variety of massage techniques and styles of training that prevail in the field.

Scope of Practice

Licensed massage therapists will take complete medical histories and develop treatment plans appropriate to individual patient need. Massage therapists will often co-manage difficult musculoskeletal cases with referring providers and physical therapists. Home exercise programs are often a part of treatment planning as well.

Scientific Basis

Massage has been studied most for the treatment of low back pain, with very promising preliminary results. More research is needed to assess long-term outcomes and cost-effectiveness. Other conditions for which massage is commonly used include lymphedema following mastectomy and promotion of growth and development in pre-term infants.

Training and Licensure

Massage therapy is regulated in 33 states plus the District of Columbia. Most states now require a minimum number of 500 hours from state recognized training programs. Within the 500 hour minimum, accredited schools are required to offer at least 300 hours in massage therapy theory and technique, and a minimum of 120 hours of anatomy, physiology and pathology.

References

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