

Manual Therapy Found Superior Over Continued Medical Care

By Dr. Ken Spresser

“In daily practice, manual therapy is a favorable treatment option for patients with neck pain compared with physical therapy or continued care by a general practitioner,” wrote Dr. Jan Hoving et al. While this doesn’t necessarily come as a surprise to chiropractors, it does astound this author since ten professionals wrote the article, two with PT degrees, eight with PhD degrees and four with MD degrees. The article was recently found in the May 21, 2002 issue of the Annals of Internal Medicine entitled, “Manual Therapy, Physical Therapy, or Continued Care by a General Practitioner for Patients with Neck Pain.”

Manual therapy in this article follows the “hands-on” definition found in CPT 2002 including mobilization and manipulation. Physical therapy is generalized to massage, modalities and exercise therapies. Between 10-15% of the general population suffer from general neck pain especially women and people over fifty years old although chiropractors see much higher percentages that are neither gender nor age specific. Manual therapy is considered a specialization within physical therapy according to the International Federation of Orthopedic Manipulative Therapies although it transcends the physical therapy profession in spite of specialized training. In this study the field work was performed by six physical therapists performing manual therapy and five physical therapists during physical therapy by the description mentioned previously. Care from the general practitioner was advice, ergonomics, examination and prescription medication.

Surprisingly, “Patients in the manual therapy group were more likely to report a temporary increase in neck pain that lasted more than two days after receiving therapy.” Would the manual therapy treatment recipient have experienced the same pain if delivered by a chiropractor? Frankly, the success rate for the manual therapy group was almost twice as high than for the group that continued care with a general practitioner for neck pain (68.3% versus 35.9%). Obviously Neck Disability Index scores and range of motion improved for all three groups especially for the manual therapy recipients. Patient receiving manual therapy had half as many absences from work than those who received drugs and advice. “Physical therapy (modalities) scored (only) slightly better than continued (medical) care.”

It is not surprising to a chiropractor that the patients in this study had pronounced perceived recovery and that normal joint motion was restored increasing the range of motion.

This is simply another study without chiropractic involvement that helps prove the efficacy of what chiropractors do in their offices each day.