

CAT

Manual therapy is a more favorable treatment option for neck pain than physical therapy without mobilization techniques or care by a general practitioner

Clinical Bottom Line(s) (level 1a)

1. Mobilizations of the neck should be included in the care plans of patients that suffer from non-specific neck pain

Citations(s):

Hoving JL, et al. Manual therapy, physical therapy, or continued care by a general practitioner for patients with neck pain. *Annals of Internal Med* 2002; 136:713-722

Clinical question.

Is manual therapy more effective than typical physical therapy that does not include mobilization techniques in decreasing pain in patients with nonspecific neck pain?

The study:

Single-blinded randomised controlled trial with intention-to-treat.

The study patients:

183 male and female subjects between 18-70 years of age with nonspecific neck pain for at least 2 weeks.

Group(s):

Manual therapy:

(N = 60; 60 analyzed at 3 weeks/ 59 at 7 weeks): Included hands on muscular mobilization techniques, specific articular mobilization techniques and coordination or stabilization techniques. No manipulations were used. 45 minute treatment sessions once per week for maximum of 6 treatments. Experienced manual therapist performed treatment.

Physical therapy without mobilization

(N = 59; 59 analyzed at 3 and 7 weeks): Active exercises were the cornerstone of treatment including range of motion and strengthen exercises along with postural exercises, stretching, and functional exercise. Manual traction, massage, interferential current or heat applications could precede exercise therapy. 30-minute treatment sessions twice per week for maximum of 12 treatments.

General practitioner

(N=64,64 analyzed at 3 and 7 weeks) Included advice on prognosis, psychosocial issues, self-care and ergonomics. Patients also received a booklet on ergonomics and exercises. Medications including paracetamol or NSAIDs were prescribed if necessary. 10-minute follow up visits every two weeks were optional.

The evidence:

Outcomes	Time to outcomes	Manual therapy (MT)	Physical therapy (PT)	General practitioner (GP)	P-value	NNT
Perceived recovery success rate	7wks	68.3%	50.8%	35.9%	P<0.05	3 MT/7-PT VS GP
Absences from work	7wks	13%	29%	26%	P<0.05	

Comments:

1. Manual therapy scored better than physical therapy on all outcome measures although not all differences were significant. Most differences were small except for perceived recovery, which combined other outcome measures like pain, disability and patient satisfaction it may be the most responsive. Manual therapy usually takes some additional training for most therapists and this aspect may limit this treatment.

Appraised by: McAndrew, Kane **Date Appraised:** July 29 2005 **Kill or Update By:** 29 July 2006