CAN IT HURT? REPORTS OF PAIN-RELATED ADVERSE EVENTS IN MASSAGE THERAPY

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**INTRODUCTION / AIM**

Patients with pain-related conditions who want to try massage therapy may be advised that "it can't hurt". Epidemiology data on which to base safety recommendations is sparse while both use and evidence of the benefits of massage therapy (MT) is growing. The objectives of this study were to 1) describe Canadian MT regulators’ views on pain-related patient safety incidents (adverse events); 2) to identify the nature of adverse events (AE) reported in Cochrane reviews of massage.

**METHODS**

Ten College of Massage Therapists of British Columbia (CMTBC) Board and staff participated in a focus group to share their views on the nature of AEs in MT. Thematic content analysis was used to describe themes from the data. Following this, the Cochrane Database of Systemic Reviews was searched for reviews of massage therapy effectiveness and safety. Data were extracted according to pre-defined inclusion criteria. Three Cochrane reviews were included in the overview.

**RESULTS**

Focus group participants' views revealed key pain-focused themes. The perceived role of the therapist and patient expectations of trust regarding procedural pain and post-treatment effects emerged from the data analysis as key themes. The overall quality of the relevant trials was reportedly low or very low with only two reviews able to described AEs. Pain-related effects included increased pain intensity, post-treatment pain, discomfort and soreness.

**DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS**

MT regulator participants view the role of the therapist as a healthcare provider entrusted to deliver safe and effective care. Patient expectations of trust are seen as critical especially when treatment might be painful. The utility of the Cochrane reviews in identifying the nature of MT-related adverse or harmful patient safety incidents reported in the medical literature is limited by the quality of the trials included in the reviews. There is a lack of assessment and reporting of adverse outcomes in massage research. Where adverse outcomes are reported the nature of the event is most often related to pain.

**OTHER AUTHORS**

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