



amta  
american **massage therapy** association®

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February 25, 2019

The Honorable Lamar Alexander  
Chair, Senate HELP Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), we are pleased to submit a statement in support of your February 12 hearing “Managing Pain During the Opioid Crisis”. In particular, we would like to note our strong support for the various statements from witnesses that noted the significance and value of non-pharmacologic therapies for pain, specifically including massage therapy, and to provide additional information about massage therapy in the context of pain management.

Established in 1943 and numbering nearly 90,000 members, AMTA works to advance the massage therapy profession through ethics and standards, the promotion of fair and consistent licensing of massage therapists in all states, and public education on the benefits of massage therapy. Massage therapists are currently licensed in 46 states and the District of Columbia.

Massage therapy has been singled-out as an effective non-pharmacologic approach to pain management, as shown by a significant body of clinical research, and supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the American College of Physicians, The Joint Commission, and many nationally renowned hospitals and other institutions, such as the Mayo Clinic, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Duke Integrative Medicine, the Cleveland Clinic and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Additionally, massage therapy is specifically mentioned in guidelines for non-pharmacologic opioid alternatives by the Attorney General of West Virginia; and, it is among a list of four non-pharmacologic approaches to pain in the September 18, 2017 letter to American’s Health Insurance Plans, signed by 37 Attorneys General. This letter urges health insurance companies to encourage health care providers to prioritize non-opioid pain management options for chronic pain, as follows:

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*“When patients seek treatment for any of the myriad conditions that cause chronic pain, doctors should be encouraged to explore and prescribe effective non-opioid alternatives, ranging from non-opioid medications (such as NSAIDs) to physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, and chiropractic care.”*

Starting this year, The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has encouraged massage therapy provided by a licensed massage therapist be a supplemental benefit in Medicare Advantage (MA) plans and in September 2018, CMS announced that at least 270 MA plans plan to provide massage therapy this year. Despite this recent very positive step, massage therapy is currently not covered through basic Medicare, or the vast majority of state Medicaid plans. While massage undertaken by an individual solely for relaxation purposes should not be a covered benefit, a physician referral for massage therapy, with appropriate documentation of medical necessity for pain related to a specific acute or chronic condition, should be covered under Medicare and promoted for inclusion as a state Medicaid benefit.

We urge the HELP Committee to address the barriers to utilization of massage therapy and other evidence-based treatments for pain that were addressed during the hearing, including coverage restrictions, lack of public and provider education, and the support of legislative efforts that will foster utilization of massage therapy as a cost effective and efficacious tool to address the multi-faceted issues surrounding pain management.

In closing, we appreciate your interest in this important topic, and we are happy to provide any additional information that may be helpful to the Committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Specker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "J".

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