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- *Noninvasive Nonpharmacological Treatments for Chronic Pain: A Systematic Review Update*
- *Opioid Treatments for Chronic Pain*
- *Nonopioid Pharmacologic Treatments for Chronic Pain*

On behalf of the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), we are pleased to comment on the draft systematic review update for “*Noninvasive Nonpharmacological Treatments for Chronic Pain.*”

AMTA represents the massage therapy profession, with over 92,000 members across the country. We have worked for over 75 years to advance the massage therapy profession and to foster quality research on the value and efficacy of massage therapy. Along with long standing recognition by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Joint Commission, the American College of Physicians (ACP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), we would like to note two recent expressions of support for the benefits of massage therapy:

- The American Academy of Spine Physicians collaborated with AMTA to develop and publish a consumer-friendly pamphlet, released in October 2019, to address the appropriate uses of massage as a part of spine care. The brochure notes when to consider massage for spine care, and specifically notes the important role of the massage therapist as a vital spine care team member:
http://www.spinephysicians.org/massage/Role%20of%20Massage%20Therapy%20Logo_Dual%20FrontB_Final_%2007212019.pdf
- New research data show that massage therapy is increasingly being utilized as a non-opioid pain management supplemental benefit in Medicare Advantage (MA) plans. Massage therapy will be covered in 190 different MA plans in CY 2020, an approximate 8x increase over the 22 plans that offered massage therapy in 2019.

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Given that MA plans must carefully consider the relative merits of cost vs. benefit in considering the addition of new benefits, we believe this speaks clearly to a growing awareness of the value of massage therapy as a nonopioid pain treatment.

In previous submissions to AHRQ, AMTA expressed concerns that AHRQ may have overlooked some of the more recent, and compelling, evidence which supports the use of massage therapy for both acute and chronic pain to improve function. In the recent draft, we are pleased to note that massage therapy is noted for pain relief for both lower back pain and neck pain. These new findings add to, and reinforce, existing research on the benefits of massage.

We also would like to take this opportunity to note for AHRQ the findings included in the HHS Pain Management Task Force final report which also strongly support the use of massage therapy, among other complementary and integrative approaches to pain management: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pmtf-final-report-2019-05-23.pdf>.

Given the benefits of massage therapy for many acute and chronic pain conditions, we encourage AHRQ to continue to broaden your consideration of massage therapy among your research topics. AMTA remains available to provide any information that may be helpful to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James E. Specker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "S".

James Specker
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