

2015

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Recommended Citation

Ford, A. D., & Trantas, L. (2015). Complementary Alternative Medicine for Chronic Pain. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/nurs_stuwork/31

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Complementary Alternative Medicine for Chronic Pain

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What We Learned

Complementary Alternative Medicines (CAM) show potential benefits as interventions for people experiencing chronic pain. Participants in 4 studies experienced positive outcomes on comfort, mood, and energy as a result of 4 separate CAM interventions

Background

Pain affects millions of people in the United States each year. Nurses are responsible for assessing and helping to manage clients' pain, therefore are familiar with the common pharmacologic approach to pain management. However, non-pharmacologic interventions, such as CAM, offer the potential of providing pain relief in addition to or in place of traditional measures.

Purpose & Aims

- To review existing data related to the effects of CAM on patients experiencing chronic pain
- To explore the experience of patients receiving CAM interventions for chronic pain

Sample

- Four peer-reviewed studies published in academic journals regarding the effects of CAM on those experiencing chronic pain

– Cino, K. (2014). Aromatherapy Hand Massage for Older Adults With Chronic Pain Living in Long-Term Care. *Journal Of Holistic Nursing*, 32(4), 304-313. doi:10.1177/0898010114528378

– Orsak, G., Kajumba, M., Stevens, A. M., Brufsky, A., & Dougall, A. L. (2015). The effects of reiki therapy and companionship on quality of life, mood, and symptom distress during chemotherapy. *Journal Of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, 20(1), 20-27. doi:10.1177/2156587214556313

– Park J., McCaffrey R. (2012). Chair yoga: benefits for community-dwelling older adults with osteoarthritis. *J Gerontol Nurs*. 38(5) 12-25. doi: 10.3928/00989134-20120411-50

– Therklson, T. (2010). Ginger compress therapy for adults with osteoarthritis. *Journal Of Advanced Nursing*, 66(10), 2225-2233. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2010.05355

Methods

- Database research – CINAHL, WCU database
- Research articles only; 3 nursing journals, 1 medical
- Published 2010-2015
- Search terms: “Complementary alternative medicine”, “pain management”, “nursing”, “massage”, “Reiki”, and “yoga”

Results



Themes:

1. Increased comfort

1. Cino (2014) – mean GMPI score for aromatherapy massage was 12.25, massage alone 12.47, nurse presence 16.68, indicating that those who received aromatherapy or massage experienced less pain than those who received nurse presence
2. Orsak (2015) – no significant differences in symptom distress for those receiving Reiki, those who received companionship, and those in the control group
3. Therklson (2010, p. 2229) – participants shared experience: “Totally relaxed with the [ginger compress]; time free of pain, great”

2. Improvement in emotional well-being

1. Park & McCaffrey (2012, p. 20) – “nothing in my situation has changed, but my attitude toward life has changed for the better. I am more calm”; “Coming to the [yoga] class is very important to me because it helps me to be ‘alright’, to feel like things in my life are not so bad.”

3. Improved energy & physical functioning

1. Three of the four studies (Orsak et al, 2015; Park & McCaffrey, 2012; Therklson, 2010) noted an increase in participants' energy as a result of the CAM intervention
2. Therklson (2010, p. 2229) – participant stated, “After the [ginger] compress, I wake up feeling awesome, awake and alive...I find my thinking is wide awake. It's like a buzz and I'm off to work sparking”;
3. Therklson (2010, p.2230) - “Having warmed up, you are relaxed and moving freer; there is no question about that”
4. Park & McCaffrey (2012) – statistically significant difference of 2.4 points in mean score for joint stiffness, indicating that joint stiffness was reduced after chair yoga sessions

Discussion

- The four articles reviewed provide evidence of the possible benefits of CAM for those experiencing chronic pain
- Nurses should educate patients about the availability of CAM as an option to assist in the treatment of pain or improve their emotional well-being or physical functioning
- While some results about the benefits of CAM were not statistically significant, the studies did not reveal any detrimental effects on participants' comfort, emotional well-being, physical function, or energy

Next Steps

- Conduct a more narrow search of CAM specific practices
- Further limit the population to certain conditions or disease processes
- Include more studies in the review of literature to obtain a more comprehensive view of the effects of CAM

Limitations

- Limitations of this review include the small number of articles included in the synthesis. A more comprehensive review is needed to provide information on multiple types of CAM for different conditions.
- Because this review focused only on 4 types of CAM, it cannot be generalized to all types of CAM or all patients experiencing chronic pain.

Acknowledgments

We thank West Chester University for the opportunity to research this topic, and Dr. Cheryl Monturo for providing instruction on nursing research.