

Massage Therapy at the Remote Area Medical Clinic

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Purpose: To explore the feasibility, healthcare provider referral, patient acceptance of and potential limitations of massage therapy (MT) at an episodic remote area medical clinic serving a rural, medically underserved population.

Description: The Remote Area Medical (RAM) clinic at Wise, Virginia, held three days each summer at the Virginia-Kentucky Fairgrounds, is the largest mobile free clinic in the nation. Over 5,000 patients from medically underserved areas are seen yearly to provide preventative care and screening examinations. For the 2009 event, organizers of the RAM medical team agreed to have massage therapy as a complementary treatment offered to patients participating in the clinic event for the first time since the clinic's inception in 2000. At previous RAM clinics massage therapy was provided by MT volunteers for clinic staff but not for patients.

Procedures: Physicians and nurse practitioners participating in the 2009 event were educated about the availability of these services for patients. A form was created for the physicians and nurse practitioners to provide specific patient information with the order for massage therapy. Certified massage therapists were recruited to volunteer for the event. Patients will complete a brief medical intake form and share their prior experience with and knowledge of massage therapy. A display will be set up to provide additional information about the benefits of massage therapy. Massage therapists will educate patients about the use of massage for stress reduction, repetitive stress injuries, back pain, headache, health promotion and well-being. Both chair and table massage will be available.

Critical Results: The number of referrals, patient diagnoses, type of therapy provided, patient prior experience and knowledge of massage therapy will be documented, acceptance of and potential limitations of massage therapy will be evaluated.

Discussion of Significance: The Remote Area Medical Clinic provides an opportunity to promote massage as a complementary therapy and increase public awareness of massage therapy in a rural environment. The results of this experience will identify barriers and facilitators to help guide the provision of massage therapy at future RAM clinics.