



Effects of Physical Therapist Training on Outcomes of Patients with Chronic Low Back Pain or Chronic Shoulder Pain *The Journal of Manual and Manipulative Therapy* Vol. 9 No. 2 (2001), 84-91

Abstract:

No studies to date have been found investigating the impact of clinical reasoning on physical therapy outcomes. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a long-term post-graduate course with emphasis in clinical reasoning enhances physical therapy outcomes in patients with chronic low back pain and chronic shoulder pain. In two outpatient clinics, patients with chronic low back pain and chronic shoulder pain were assigned to participating physical therapists. Therapists who had attended a long-term course with an emphasis on development of clinical reasoning skills (group 1) were compared to therapists who had not attended the long-term course (group 2). This course was entitled *A Long-Term Course in Manual Therapy: Maitland Approach*, presented by an expert physical therapist with significant post-graduate education in manual therapy. The course involved class participation one weekend a month for 12 months, with approximately 16 hours of class time on those weekends. Content focused on musculoskeletal examination and intervention. In addition, participants were required to develop case study presentations emphasizing clinical reasoning between each monthly session.

Patients completed the Revised Disability Questionnaire (Oswestry) or the Shoulder Rating Questionnaire on the initial and final visits. This study used a prospective, mixed design. The independent variables were therapist training and time of measurement. The dependent variables were functional tool scores, number of visits, and efficiency ratio (change in functional tool score/number visits.) For both diagnoses and therapist groups, a significant improvement was evident in patient's functional tool scores, indicating the overall positive effect of physical therapy. But for patients with chronic low back pain, therapists in group 1 demonstrated significantly fewer number of visits (5.3 vs. 7.6); (p, 0.001) and likewise, there was a greater efficiency ratio (5.6 vs. 1.8); (p< 0.001). For chronic shoulder pain, therapists in group 1 also demonstrated significantly fewer visits (6.3 vs. 10.8); (p<0.026) and a greater efficiency ratio (3.9 vs. 1.9); (p< 0.026). This suggests that therapists completing a long-term course emphasizing clinical reasoning have better effectiveness (change in functional tool scores) for low back pain or chronic shoulder pain than therapists who have not completed the long-term course.

Comments:

To maximize positive physical therapy experiences and outcomes, physicians and patients could use information such as this when looking for a physical therapist. Good manually trained therapists will always have done extensive course work in manual therapy courses that are geared for critical thinking and clinical reasoning in diagnosis and treatment. I know that those of us who have had this type of manual therapy training know what a difference it has made in our treatment outcomes.

THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT



Cindy Molina, MSPT

Cindy joined Back to Motion in November 2007 with 6 years of experience as a Physical Therapist. She received her masters degree in Physical Therapy at Texas Woman's University, Dallas Texas and is currently working on her manual therapy certification through the North American Institute of Orthopedic Manual Therapy. Cindy has experience in out-patient as well as in-patient orthopedics, neuro-rehabilitation, and long term care. She especially enjoys treating shoulder injuries. Cindy enjoys playing volleyball, hiking, gardening and traveling.



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PTAC CLINICS

*All Pro Physical Therapy 303.757.2455
1776 S. Jackson St. #501, Denver CO 80210*

*Back To Motion Physical Therapy 303.832.5577
616 Washington St. #100, Denver CO 80203
3535 S. Lafayette St., Englewood CO 80110*

*Feldhake Physical Therapy 303.778.7246
1550 S. Pearl St. #101, Denver CO 80210*

*Foothills Physical Therapy 303.761.3085
901 Englewood Pkwy, Englewood CO 80110*

*Sagewood Physical Therapy 303.733.5255
1711 S. Pearl St., Denver CO 80210*

*Sport and Spine Physical Therapy 720.493.1181
7340 S. Alton Way 11-D, Centennial CO 80112
374 Inverness Pkwy, Englewood CO 80112
10146 W. San Juan Way #120, Littleton CO 80127
2418 E. Bridge St., Brighton CO 80601*