

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

2019 Winner: American Massage Therapy Association

Entry Title: Addressing the Opioid Epidemic with Massage Therapy

Project Overview

A recent analysis by the National Safety Council found that Americans are now more likely to die of an opioid overdose than a car crash. As the United States struggles with this epidemic of opioid use and its devastating effects on lives, society and the economy, it's important to consider the role massage therapy can play in pain management. New research indicates the use of massage therapy as an alternative to opioid medication could save lives while significantly reducing costs to the American economy.

AMTA commissioned an economic modeling analysis to examine the costs and benefits of replacing opioid pain killers with massage therapy where evidence shows it is appropriate and effective. The results indicated that the number of individuals in the U.S. with the potential to benefit from massage therapy can be as many as 5 million, while reducing the number of people with addiction disorder by up to 111,137 per year. This projection suggests providing massage therapy as a tool for pain management instead of opioids could save the United States between \$23.59 and \$25.99 billion annually in social and economic costs associated with early death, treatment and crime prevention.

AMTA launched an advocacy campaign, reaching out to legislators, insurance companies and collaborators in the health care profession to discuss the current science behind massage therapy and its role in pain management.

Goals/Objectives

The main goals of this advocacy campaign include:

- 1) Encouraging medical practitioners to prescribe the use of massage therapy instead of opioids, in cases where it would be an effective pain management tool.
- 2) To actively engage the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to include massage therapy for pain management through Medicare Advantage programs.
- 3) To encourage insurance companies to cover massage therapy as an alternative to opioids in cases where it would be an effective pain management tool.
- 4) To promote the wealth of research that has shown the impact of massage therapy as a complement to other non-pharmacological and pharmacological approaches for pain management to national and state legislators, insurance companies, collaborators in the healthcare field, AMTA members (massage therapists) and the general public.

Strategy/Tactics

The following strategies and tactics were part of the integrated campaign effort:

1) AMTA published a new report, "Massage Therapy in Integrative Care & Pain Management" to serve as an educational tool, providing research demonstrating massage therapy's value and efficacy in pain management. This publication also includes an economic analysis of the cost savings of massage therapy for pain versus opioids. AMTA has distributed the publication to health care organizations, insurers, as well as national and state legislators.

2) AMTA developed an opioids hub page (www.amtamassage.org/opioids) on its website to serve as a central location for housing updates on national efforts and important initiatives for our advocacy campaign. AMTA members can also use the hub page as a resource when talking to clients

3) AMTA has made a concerted effort to provide public education on massage to key pain organizations including the American College of Physicians and the Academy of Integrated Pain Management. The outreach focused on the importance of integrative therapies (such as massage therapy) in changing approaches to pain management.

4) AMTA was represented and participated in national healthcare panels, including the November Alliance for Balanced Pain Management Summit in Washington, D.C. AMTA was also an active participant in the Academy of Integrated Pain Management National Conference and the November Integrative Care Policy Congress in Boston.

5) AMTA promoted current massage therapy research to the general public, including issuing multiple press releases to national consumer, business and healthcare media on the growing body of research on massage therapy as an alternative to opioids.

6) In September 2018, AMTA wrote to 700 Medicare Advantage programs encouraging them to support the April 2018 clarification by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that they should work toward including massage therapy for pain management.

Success Metrics/Results Achieved

AMTA has achieved the following results from this campaign:

1) With input from AMTA and other stakeholders in the fight for safer pain relief options, the final draft of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) blueprint includes a recommendation of complementary therapies as defined by NIH/NCCIH (National Institutes of Health and the National Center for Complementary & Integrative Health) in October 2018. These complementary therapies include massage therapy.

2) The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced in September 2018 that up to 270 Medicare Advantage plans will cover massage therapy for pain

management when provided by a state licensed massage therapist, beginning in 2019. In a January 2019 letter, CMS encouraged all plans to cover massage therapy in 2020.

3) In January 2019, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through an Inter-Agency Task Force, published a draft report on pain management best practices. This draft calls for individualized, patient-centered pain management, and it includes recommendations related to massage therapy.

4) AMTA issued three press releases promoting research on massage therapy as an alternative to opioids for pain management to national consumer, business and health care media. Each press release reached 80 million people, including Here's Yahoo!, Market Watch, and over 240 media outlets.

5) The three press releases mentioned above were also posted on social media and had a combined audience reach of over 44,000 massage therapists.

6) AMTA has distributed the Massage Therapy in Integrated Care reports and fact sheets to over 3,000 individuals in the health care, insurance, and legislation arenas to help educate these groups on massage therapy as part of the solution for the opioid crisis.

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[Massage Therapy Research Roundup #1](#)

[Massage Therapy Research Roundup #2](#)

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Association Website:

www.amtamassage.org