



Physical Therapists Offer Low-Cost Solution to Increasing Health Costs

Spinal Manipulation, Exercise and Advice Offer Patients an Effective Alternative for Back Pain



Tallahassee, Florida, Feb. 14, 2008 – Health care expenditures for patients with spinal conditions are rising without an associated increase in health status, according to a February, 2008 research report appearing in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The study suggests Americans may be wasting their money for treatments as the overall proportion of people with impaired function increased from 1997-2005, despite a 65% increase in expenditures to treat spine conditions. Physical therapists offering spinal manipulation, exercise, and advice can provide an effective alternative for patients with back and neck problems, often at a lower cost.

"I think the truth is we have perhaps oversold what we have to offer," said Richard A. Deyo, a physician at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland and a coauthor of the report. "All the imaging we do, all the drug treatments, all the injections, all the operations have some benefit for some patients. But I think in each of those situations we've begun using those tests or treatments more widely than science would really support."

What science does support is the effectiveness of physical therapy for affecting outcomes in patients with spinal conditions. "Research has consistently shown the value of particular physical therapy interventions for patients with back and neck problems," said Dr. Timothy Flynn of Regis University in Denver, CO, and President of the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT). "Specifically, spinal manipulation and exercise have repeatedly been shown to be effective in managing patients' current pain and preventing future episodes."

Particularly discouraging in this recent report was an increase in pharmaceutical expenditures of 171% during the study period. This suggests that physicians are over-utilizing an ineffective treatment for spine pain.

"You have drugs, you have surgery, or you have us," explained Flynn. "The reality is that very few treatments have shown the ability to truly affect patients with spine conditions. Physical therapists can do just that."

These treatments include hands-on therapies to mobilize the spine and exercises designed to alleviate low back pain. Flynn suggests that patients should seek out physical therapists as a first-line treatment for these conditions.

A separate study in 2006 demonstrated that patients with back pain were experiencing an increase in the rates of imaging and injections, meanwhile realizing a significant under-utilization of physical therapy.

For more on the benefits physical therapists can provide in the management of back and neck problems, contact your nearest Integrated Rehabilitation Services office.