

Massage Therapy in VA -Fact Sheet

Integrative Health Coordinating Center-
VHA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

Definitions:

Clinical massage therapy is the manipulation of the soft tissues of the human body for therapeutic purposes. Based in ancient traditions, massage therapy is a professional health care discipline in the United States.

Background and Policy on in VA

Clinical massage therapy is one of the evidence-based, complementary and integrative health (CIH) approaches within the VHA Whole Health System of care covered by the Veterans medical benefits package when deemed clinically necessary by their care team per VHA Directive 1137 – Provision of Complementary and Integrative Health, published in May 2017.

VHA established the profession of Massage Therapy to be covered under 38 U.S.C. §7401(3) and associated qualification standards for Massage Therapists to be able to provide this service.

Massage Therapy Safety and Effectiveness

An evidence map of massage therapy was developed by the U.S Department of Veteran Affairs Health Services Research & Development. This systematic review provides a visual map of the evidence for massage therapy. Conditions with evidence of positive effect include high-confidence evidence that massage therapy is effective for reducing pain in a variety of conditions.

<https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/esp/massage.cfm>

Massage therapy appears to have very few risks when used appropriately and when provided by a professionally qualified Massage Therapist.

Occupational Guidance

Standards for VA employees and community care professionals practicing massage therapy as part of their position fall under Qualification Standard GS-0640 series guidelines:

- The provider has adequately passed requirements for basic or advanced training in Massage Therapy
- The provider maintains license/credentials as required for Massage Therapy



Treatment Guidance

Currently in VA, massage therapy is recommended primarily for pain conditions for which there is an evidence base. It is acknowledged that any printed guidance must always be applied in the context of clinical judgment and the needs of an individual patient. Variations in treatment frequency and duration may be reasonable based upon issues including, but not limited to complicating factors, co-morbidity, scheduling, interruptions in care, and patient compliance.

Treatment for a variety of conditions can be usually be accomplished between 3-12 weeks in duration with 4-8 visits/treatments within that timeframe.

Online Resources

VHA Directive 1137: Provision of Complementary and Integrative Health:

https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=5401