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Integrative Care Therapies and Pain in Hospitalized Children and Adolescents: A Retrospective Database Review

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Purpose: Pain is a common problem for pediatric inpatients. Integrative care therapies have demonstrated efficacy as adjunctive approaches to pain management among adult inpatients. However, little research exists on the efficacy of integrative care therapies for pain in pediatric inpatients. The purpose of this study was to examine associations between integrative care therapies and pain and relaxation outcomes in hospitalized children/adolescents at a large Midwestern pediatric hospital.

Methods: We conducted a retrospective database review of an inpatient clinical database using a practice-based naturalistic design. Therapists delivered integrative care therapies (primarily massage therapy and healing touch) to hospitalized children/adolescents over a one year-period, and obtained pre-post ratings of pain and relaxation. We used paired-samples t-tests to examine the extent to which changes in pain and relaxation were associated with the delivery of integrative care therapies. Consistent with standard clinical practice, we examined pain outcomes separately for distinct clinical and demographic groups. No control group was available.

Results: Five-hundred nineteen hospitalized children/adolescents were treated by integrative care therapists for primarily pain or anxiety and had pre-post outcomes data available. Patients had a mean age of 10.2 years ($SD=7.0$), 224 were female (43%), and 383 were Caucasian (74%). Mean pain scores decreased significantly from pre- to post-therapy across all subgroups ($t=8.1$ to 12.0 , $p<.001$). Up to 77% of patients showed greater than a 50% reduction in pain. Across all subgroups, patients reported significantly greater relaxation following integrative care therapies ($t=16.4$, $p<.001$).

Conclusion: Integrative care therapies were associated with significant improvements in pain and relaxation among a large, inpatient pediatric population. Results indicate a need for rigorous, controlled studies of integrative care therapies for pediatric inpatient pain. Future studies with control groups should examine whether integrative care reduces both pain and cost in inpatient pediatric settings.

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