



A Guide to Evidence-informed Practice for Massage Therapists

What is evidence-informed practice?

Many RMTs have likely heard the term evidence-informed practice, however, it may not be a concept that is fully understood. Evidence-informed practice (EIP) is derived from the term evidence-based medicine (EBM), which was defined by Sackett et al., as the “conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients” (1996).

Evidence-informed practice is an essential process in which health-care providers incorporate information from the three categories listed below to make decisions about client care (Aveyard & Sharp, 2017):

1. **Best available evidence:** RMTs keep their knowledge current by reviewing up-to-date research such as manual therapy best practice recommendations, new findings in specific populations (e.g., pediatrics, cancer, chronic pain), science, and theory. For example, RMTs should regularly review current best practice recommendations for adults with chronic low back pain.
2. **Client needs and preferences:** RMTs discuss client needs and preferences and incorporate that information into the assessment, treatment plan, and any home-care advice. For example, a client who presents with a repetitive strain injury asks that the RMT use gentle massage techniques as this has provided them with the best pain relief in the past.
3. **RMT’s skills and knowledge:** RMTs use their accumulated experience, skills, and knowledge to guide the decision-making process and client care. For example, an RMT who is treating an adult with plantar fasciitis would discuss with the client their needs and preferences while also providing information and treatment options based on the RMT’s experience, skills, and knowledge.

Evidence-informed practice is used by all health-care professionals to best inform clinical decisions and treatment and can improve outcomes in client care. The three

areas referenced above work together in different ratios for different situations to promote safe and effective care (Aveyard & Sharp, 2017).

Why is evidence-informed practice important?

Ethical standards and principles guide RMTs in providing safe and effective health-care experiences for their clients. These principles require RMTs to maintain high standards of knowledge and skills after they finish entry-to-practice education. This is achieved through keeping up to date on the best available evidence, participating in quality continuing education, and applying new knowledge to Massage Therapy practice.

For example, EIP guides RMTs in providing ethical, safe, and effective care by ensuring informed consent is acquired. Informed consent can only be obtained when RMTs give clients (or a client's substitute decision-maker) all the relevant information about a treatment plan, including reviewing risks and benefits, ensuring the client understands the information, and answering any questions.

Evidence-informed practice allows RMTs to provide clients with accurate information ensuring that they can consent to their treatment, which is a fundamental principle of ethical care.

Using a variety of information to inform your massage therapy practice

RMTs should access research from a variety of sources, and not be limited to that provided only by massage therapy publications. Massage therapy research is quickly accumulating, and many academic journals regularly publish research on the effects of massage and manual therapy. However, Baskwill and Dore (2016) make an important point that because RMTs treat such diverse populations and health-care needs, they should not limit their research use solely to massage therapy-related materials and should "utilize research from many fields, from anatomy and physiology to physiotherapy and chiropractic to nursing and medicine" (Baskwill & Dore, 2016, p 41).

What is critical thinking?

Knowing how to read and think about information available to the profession is vital in providing safe and effective massage therapy care. Critical thinking asks RMTs to take a step back from the information they are reading, hearing, or seeing and ask certain questions about the content. This process helps RMTs to be logical, careful, and responsible about the information they consume and use in their practice, and it can

prevent RMTs from quickly accepting or rejecting information based on assumptions, biases, or previous knowledge (Aveyard, Sharp, & Wooliams, 2015, p 7). For example, research papers examining a particular topic may report conflicting outcomes. The process of critical thinking can help RMTs determine which research is more credible and which information to use in their practice.

Research literacy

There are multiple methods by which RMTs are able to critically assess research in science and health care. The CAARP method (**C**urrency, **A**uthority, **A**ccuracy, **R**elevance, and **P**urpose), is just one of a variety of critical thinking tools that RMTs can use to ask questions and identify the validity of information. Massage therapists are encouraged to explore various methods to discover which fit best with their learning style and needs.

Currency	Is the information current?
Authority	Who is the author and what are their qualifications?
Accuracy	Is the information supported by evidence?
Relevance	Does the information answer your question?
Purpose	Are the author's intentions clear?

Adapted from Lebert, Richard. (September 12, 2018). Evidence-Based Practice for Massage Therapists part 1, retrieved on June 19, 2022 from <https://www.rmtedu.com/blog/evidence-based-practice-for-massage-therapists-1>

Practical practice tips

There are a variety of simple ways to bring research into massage therapy practice, including:

- Reading one research article a week and practicing using the CAARP (or other) method;

- Taking the time to review best practices in neuromusculoskeletal health;
- Finding an evidence-informed blog or website and reading the author's reviews of the literature; and
- Starting a research review/study group with colleagues and encouraging conversation.

Research can often be locked behind a paywall and if RMTs are unable to subscribe, they can look for open access articles and free e-books. For example, The International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork is an *open access* journal, meaning that it publishes all of its content free for readers.

Selected research resources

- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- Cochrane Library
- Evidence-Based Massage Therapy – (Open Access E-Book) by Richard Lebert
- International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (Open Access massage therapy research database)
- Journal of Manual and Manipulative Therapy
- Massage Therapy Foundation
- Massage Therapy: Integrating Research and Practice, (2012). Editors: Christopher Moyer and Trish Dryden
- National Library of Medicine PubMed

References

- Aveyard, H., & Sharp, P. (2017). *A beginner's guide to evidence-based practice in health and social care. (3rd Ed)*. Open University Press McGraw-Hill Education.
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- Baskwill, A., & Dore, K. (2016). Exploring the awareness of research among registered massage therapists in Ontario. *Journal of Complementary and Integrative Medicine*, 13(1), 41- 49.
- Lebert, Richard. (2018, September 12). Evidence-based practice for massage therapists: Part 1. Retrieved 19 June 2022 from <https://www.rmtedu.com/blog/evidence-based-practice-for- massage-therapists-1>.

- Sackett, D.L., Rosenberg, W.M.C., Muir Gray, J.A., Haynes, R.B., & Richardson. W.S. (1996). Evidence-based medicine: What it is and what it isn't. *British Medical Journal*, 312(7023), 71-72.

Relevant documents

- Code of Ethics
- Standard of Practice: Consent