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## **Will Research Prove Our Point?**

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There is a belief in the massage profession that research is needed to validate massage and gain acceptance from the medical industry. Some feel the public will participate in greater numbers if research "proves" the efficacy of massage.

These are false assumptions. The number of people paying for massage out of their own pockets has doubled in the last three years (from 8% to 16% of the population), proving that massage works.

Research is a business. Thousands of people make their living doing research. To expand their business, they have promoted the notion that nothing is valid until it is proven with a double-blind study. This is a lie, but it has become accepted as truth. The truth is, double-blind studies are a mechanism to restrict entry into the marketplace. One of the primary places the double-blind research industry has established itself firmly is in the field of human health. This is unfortunate for both humans and health.

The medical/pharmaceutical industry, the third leading cause of death in the U.S., uses double-blind research to control the marketing of products and procedures. According to their agents, nothing is valid without a double-blind study. If something goes wrong, they say, "We did a study that shows this is OK." If some "new" product, like an herb, or a procedure, like massage, is offered to the public, they will attack it and attempt to suppress it by saying, "There is no valid research to prove this." It doesn't matter that the herb has been used for hundreds of years with consistent success. It is irrelevant that massage has been a predominant health care system for thousands of years.

If enough research is done to prove massage is valid, massage will be accepted at last. Maybe those gleaming insurance dollars will come to therapists who are drooling over them. Sorry, you do not understand research.

You can prove almost anything with a double-blind study. Studies can be created to prove almost anything causes cancer. Alter the diet of the subjects, put them in the right environment - and presto - whatever is being tested causes cancer, especially in rats. It can be proven that virtually everyone who has gotten cancer has eaten lettuce sometime in their lives!

Invalid research? No. Under a certain set of circumstances, a certain thing being tested can cause a certain result. Unfortunately, we are seldom told all the circumstances. We are just told the desired outcome.

"Oat bran doesn't lower cholesterol." We were not told that the test subjects had normal cholesterol levels and high blood pressure in that study. Of course oat bran didn't lower cholesterol in people with normal levels. This study was used to counteract the study that proved oat bran did lower cholesterol, in people with high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Confused? Good, that's the idea. What do confused people do? Nothing. They avoid the cheap, nontoxic nutritional remedy and, in this case, go back on the drugs like good patients.

The research industry keeps itself busy by replicating results. If someone proves something that is not desired, the establishment says, "One study doesn't prove something. You have to wait until others have replicated your results." Now another study must be funded, and another, and another. Then someone else will conduct a study and set it up in such a way to disprove the initial study. Research will never bring about the acceptance of something the establishment doesn't want accepted. Research will always bring about the acceptance of anything the establishment wants accepted (i.e., aspartame.)

Massage is particularly difficult to research. It is difficult to control all the possible variables, and there are many different massage techniques to use. A study was done that supposedly disproved the theory that sports massage reduced lactic acid in athletes after competition. The study was done by a college that has no expertise in massage. There were no sports massage therapists in the area. Who did sports massage on the subjects? That didn't seem to matter. The press ran with it. There are lots of great massage techniques that, even if done by experts, would not reduce lactic acid levels. Further, the appropriate techniques, if done incorrectly, would not work either. Double-blind research may be **too** blind.

The point here is not to argue against the massage profession supporting research. There is much to be learned by double-blind research. Excellent research is being done by Dr. Tiffany Field (of the Touch Research Institute), among others. Their should be commended and supported. However, we need to remember that if the results become threatening to the medical/pharmaceutical industry, they can and will be

easily disproved.

Research may be a huge potential danger to the massage profession. If studies done by well-trained massage therapists indicate benefits from massage, the public will go to therapists expecting to receive those benefits. Unfortunately, there are so many poorly trained therapists out there that most of the public will be disappointed. This has the potential to cause a huge backlash against our profession. If capitalized on by opposing forces, it could set massage back years in efforts to legitimize the profession in the eyes of the public.

Let's not pour every available dollar into research, hoping it will legitimize massage. It won't, in and of itself. What will legitimize the profession is the public receiving consistent, high-quality services from well-trained professionals. We must work to establish more consistent levels of education and expertise at the entry level. Continuing education in advanced levels of massage therapy should be encouraged, if not mandated.

Only when the public can receive similar benefits to those proven in studies will research become an effective marketing tool to the public. It will never be an effective means of gaining acceptance from the medical/pharmaceutical industry. The public has already voted positively on the efficacy of massage. If we as a profession work to meet the public's expectations, we will be unstoppable. If we work to prove ourselves to the sickness industry, it may well be our downfall.

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Click [here](#) for more information about Ralph Stephens, BS, LMT, NCTMB.



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