

Learning about research

Evidence-based practice, and similar phrases, are to be found in almost all discussions of the modern practice of mainstream, complementary, alternative and/or integrated health care, including those involving bodywork.

Questions relative to almost anything performed as treatment, call forth questions such as:

- Does it work, and if so how?
- How effective is it compared with other approaches?
- Is it cost-effective?
- Is it safe?

Answers to these, and similar, questions emerge out of research, and in this issue *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* presents the first segment of a major series on research, *Methodological issues in investigations of massage/bodywork therapy: Part 1*. The series will run throughout this volume (i.e. in this and the next three issues). The original article, which has been adapted to form this series, was written in 1999, as a commissioned paper for the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) Foundation, by Claire Cassidy, PhD. It has been revised, updated and restructured into four segments by Jacqueline Hart, MD (with Dr Cassidy's co-operation), specifically for publication in *JBMT*.

The series will examine the issues, problems and a wide range of

possible research solutions and options, applicable to the bodywork arena. This will hopefully lay the foundations for a greater interest in research by individual practitioners as well as being a resource for researchers to evaluate as they consider the choices open to them when attempting to answer the basic questions listed above.

A series of additional articles are in the pipeline that will offer very specific clinically based audit and research methodologies that practitioners and therapists can utilize in their own practices, to gather information and to make sense of outcomes.

The need for better research is highlighted by research into the value (or lack of it) of stretching in sports settings as a preventative measure against injury and discomfort. This will be featured in the next issue (April 2003) of *JBMT*.

Many readers will be aware of the article that appeared in the *British Medical Journal* in August 2002, that was picked up by the media, and translated into headlines such as 'Don't bother to stretch – it can't prevent sport injuries.' The article in question (Herbert & Gabriel 2002) triggered a flurry of angry responses from many in the bodywork professions, particularly those working in sports settings, who saw the media reporting of the article's message, as simplistic and inaccurate.

JBMT invited a cross-section of respected individuals to comment on the issues and the specific research paper in the *BMJ*, from their own

perspectives, including physiotherapists, osteopaths, chiropractors, athletic and personal trainers, coaches, massage therapists and Rolfers. A number of the responses to the *BMJ* article will be published in the next issue under the title: 'The stretching debate' (others may appear in subsequent issues, space permitting). The authors of the *BMJ* article have agreed to write a response to the comments.

Evidence of the potentially hugely beneficial possibilities that bodywork research has to offer, as well as of the dangers of misinterpretation of research findings, highlights the need for us all to be aware of the need for careful reflection as to the validity and accuracy of research-based evidence, especially when reported by some quarters of the media, where sensationalism seems to be more important than accuracy. It pays to read research papers in their entirety before making judgements as to the value of the evidence.

The Editorial Advisory Board, my Associate editors, the publishing team and myself, wish you a happy, healthy and productive 2003.

REFERENCES

- Herbert R, Gabriel M 2002 Effects of stretching before and after exercising on muscle soreness and risk of injury: systematic review. *British Medical Journal* 325: 468.

Leon Chaitow
Editor