



**JAN - FEB 2008**

**SPINAL STENOSIS** - One of the more frequent questions asked by our referring physicians is what benefit can be gained from prescribing massage therapies for patients with stenosis or other forms of low back pain. There is a rapidly growing body of evidence suggesting massage therapies combined with physical therapies can play a significant role in the pain management process without the associated risk of side effects that accompany many of the prescription drugs prescribed for this condition. Perhaps the best indication of efficacy includes the advocacy of massage for the treatment of stenosis in the on-line websites from the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, the American Journal of Neurological Surgeons, the Arthritis Foundation, the

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, the National Institutes of Health, the New York University Hospital Spine Center, the University of Michigan Department of Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine, the Columbia College of Physicians & Surgeons, and Weill Medical College of Cornell University, among others. Even pharmaceutical companies like Merck acknowledge the role of massage in their Geriatrics Manual. A New York Times in depth report on back pain refers to massage therapy as a frequently mentioned “cost effective” treatment for various forms of acute and chronic low back pain (including stenosis) especially when it is combined with exercise and patient education. What is interesting about this article is that it acknowledges the role physical therapy has in the treatment of pre and post surgical back pain, but it specifically mentions that “patients often find it difficult to maintain (physical) therapy.” To us, it means the real benefit of massage is that it makes the physical therapies more palatable; because when our therapists blend different massage techniques with more active physical therapies, patients often don’t realize they are participating in an active rehabilitative program. As a result, our patients are more willing to follow their assigned therapy protocols simply because they enjoy the massage. We are able to do this because our massage therapists are certified and accredited in various physical therapy modalities such as joint mobilization, myofascial release, positional release, and therapeutic exercises. In addition, several of our physical and occupational therapists are also licensed massage therapists. As massage techniques have become more mainstream in the treatment of stenosis and other forms of low back pain, publications such as the June 2003 Annals of Internal Medicine recently included three studies that found massage “to be cost effective for persistent back pain (including stenosis), **especially for improving patient functioning.**” As the U.S economy starts to slow down, we believe patients will be adopting a more cost effective approach to managing their own health care expenses, and will demand more results from the dollars they spend on health care. What makes this intriguing from our perspective of efficacy and cost effectiveness, is that the definition of “massage” in most of these studies is what is the medical research community defines as “swedish massage”. Frankly, we consider swedish massage to be mostly fluff and buff, compared to our “massage” programs that are built around a combination of passive and active physical therapy techniques along with a home exercise program. So, any association with what our therapists do, and what most people think of as “massage” (a spa treatment) would be incorrect. As a result,

**Please consider asking your doctor for a referral to our practice if you are bothered by pain, suffer from an injury, or are planning a surgery. You can print a referral form (Rx form) from the home page of this website.**