INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain is a debilitating condition that typically lasts longer than 6 months. It affects many individuals throughout daily life. The typical treatment for chronic pain is NSAIDs and opioids to help patients with the pain. This presents with many side effects for patients. An approach that can help patients without the use of NSAIDs and opioids is using integrative medicine. Integrative medicine combines both conventional and alternative medicine and is more geared towards being patient-centered and healing-oriented. It goes beyond the treatment of symptoms to address all causes of illness. These therapies include treatments such as massage therapy, osteopathic and spinal manipulation, acupuncture, and yoga. All forms of the therapies work in different ways in which patients can manage chronic pain and not depend on NSAIDs and opioids as these have several side effects.

METHODS

The Systematic Review was conducted through PubMed, EBSCO electronic databases, using keywords: “integrative medicine”, “pain”, “chronic pain”, “pain management”, and the use of Boolean operators “and”, “or”, and “not”, in order to identify relative studies that discussed the effectiveness of using alternative medicine for the treatment of chronic pain. The inclusion criteria was that the articles must be a scholarly or peer-reviewed journal, that the articles must be recent and within the past 5 to 7 years, and that the articles are published in the English language. The outcome measures that were included are the change in degree of pain, quality of life before and after, and any side effects.

LIMIATIONS

The systematic review did not specify a limit of a minimum number of participants that must be included within the reviewed studies. All forms of studies were allowed for the systematic review, but for a more concise review, just only randomized controlled trials should be included in the study. For future, side effects, as well as short and long-term impacts of the four integrative treatments analyzed, should be included within the systematic review.

DISCUSSION

After reviewing the articles used within the systematic review, integrative medicine can aid in significantly reducing chronic pain. The most effective therapy was massage therapy as this therapy targets the areas most affected in patients with chronic pain while also being cost-efficient and accessible compared to other therapies. While all therapies showed a significant reduction in pain, the therapy that did not show as significant of a reduction in pain was osteopathic and spinal manipulation. This therapy still showed reduction in pain particularly for lower back pain.

RESULTS

Within all the studies included within the systematic review it was shown that massage therapy when done in optimal doses showed significant results in reduction of chronic pain for neck pain and lower back pain. Myofascial massage showed beneficial results for pain post breast cancer surgery. Osteopathic and spinal manipulation showed significant reduction for lower back pain. Another method, traditional acupuncture showed significant reduction in lower back pain as well but different forms of acupuncture such as electroacupuncture and laser acupuncture were effective for treating knee osteoarthritis. Yoga showed a reduction in the intensity of chronic pain with no adverse effects. The overall impact of all therapies showed either a reduction or significant reduction in chronic pain in patients.

CONCLUSION

Chronic pain is usually treated with opioid and NSAIDs, which carries a risk for overdose, addiction and adverse effects. Approaches using integrative medicine have shown benefits in the management of chronic pain and can be performed as an alternative to pharmaceutical use or other traditional methods of treatment. This systematic review showed that all forms of alternative medicine included in this review, massage therapy, osteopathic allowed patients to achieve and spinal manipulation, acupuncture, and yoga, allowed a reduction in pain intensity or relief without the use of opioids, NSAIDs or other traditional methods of chronic pain management.

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LITERATURE CITED