

December 15, 2017

Gopal Khanna, Director
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Submitted electronically at: <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/node/31611>

Re: Noninvasive, Nonpharmacological Treatment for Chronic Pain: A Systematic Review

Dear Mr. Khanna,

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), representing 125,000 social workers, submits comments for the Noninvasive, Nonpharmacological Treatment for Chronic Pain: A Systematic Review. NASW is the largest professional social work organization in the United States.

The social work profession promotes the well-being of individuals, families and communities and social workers serve vulnerable populations with chronic mental and physical conditions. Social workers work as private practitioners and are employed in a variety of health care settings. They provide psychosocial support to patients and families and help individuals reach their personal goals while living with illness. Clinical social workers provide clinical assessment and treatment for mental health conditions and are the largest group of providers of mental health services in the U.S.


NASW is encouraged by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ) findings, that nonpharmacological treatments can be helpful for chronic pain conditions and psychological therapies can moderately improve chronic low back pain and fibromyalgia. Using a biopsychosocial model, social workers have training and expertise in delivering a range of therapies such as those described in the report (cognitive behavioral therapy, biofeedback, relaxation techniques, acceptance and commitment therapy), and mindfulness practices (meditation, mindfulness-based stress reduction practices).

While the trials examined in the report did not include comorbid mental health conditions, individuals living with chronic pain and functional impairments often experience distress, depression and anxiety that exacerbate pain. It is important to understand the relationship between chronic pain and mental health conditions. NASW hopes that further research will be done to clarify this link and identify the specific treatment modalities that should be employed within behavioral health services to address pain and function for a variety of chronic pain conditions. NASW supports nonpharmacological treatment for chronic pain and recommends licensed clinical social workers as one of the disciplines to be involved in providing treatment.

Provider teams across health settings should consider alternatives to pharmacological treatments and apply integrative, multimodal care models for chronic pain conditions. As CMS has encouraged through their Transforming Clinical Practice Initiative to advance integrated care (<https://innovation.cms.gov/initiatives/Transforming-Clinical-Practices/>), there is a need for physicians and nurses to partner with behavioral health providers in the community. Establishing connections between mental health and physical health providers facilitates the referral and follow-up process and leads to better health outcomes and cost savings throughout the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Should you have any questions about NASW comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at naswceo@socialworkers.org or 202-408-8600, Ext. 200.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Angelo McClain in cursive script.

Angelo McClain, Ph.D., LICSW
Chief Executive Officer