



Massage therapy students' perceptions of the use of the Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS)[®] to monitor client pain



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Abstract

The Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS)[®] is a validated, self-reporting pain assessment which includes functional language for each number on the basic 0-10 pain scale. This, along with visual cues such as colors and faces, can help clients determine their pain scores more confidently. Supplemental questions to assess the impact their pain has on sleep, mood, stress, and activities can also be asked of the chronic pain clients. Massage therapy students from two colleges (one in Canada, the other in New Zealand) were asked to use the DVPRS[®] for 3-4 months with chronic pain clients in clinics and then complete a survey. The students reported that the DVPRS[®] was easy to use and they all recommend its use by other massage therapists.

Introduction

Pain is a subjective quality which varies from person-to-person and even changes with mood or time of day. In both massage clinical practice and research a variety of tools are used by clients (a.k.a. patients) or subjects to self-report pain during the pre-treatment assessment. This includes 0-10 numeric rating scales and similar visual analog scales which are widely used to rate pain intensity in clinical practice and research. Neither takes into account the impact of pain on a person's life. There are longer pain inventories available that can do this (some at a cost), but these are not practical in a clinic setting where clients are paying for treatment.

A new pain rating scale called the Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale[®], or DVPRS[®], has been developed by the Army Pain Management Task Force and has been recently validated (Nassif, 2015; Polomano, 2016) as a tool not only

Introduction, cont.

for quantifying pain intensity, but also for providing information on how chronic pain affects the biopsychosocial aspects of client lives such as sleep, activity, mood, and stress (Flynn, 2017). Change from long-standing assessment practices within any profession can be a challenge. This research project was undertaken to determine if the DVPRS[®] was easy to use and beneficial to student massage therapists during assessment.

Methods

The DVPRS[®] (Figure 1) was introduced in person to 48 second-year Okanagan Valley College of Massage Therapy (BC, Canada) diploma students and 17 second- and third-year Southern Institute of Technology (NZ) Massage Therapy degree students. They were asked to use this pain-rating tool in their assessments of chronic pain clients in student clinics and outreach programs. A recording chart was incorporated into their usual charting package. After 3-4 months of use, the student therapists were asked to complete an online survey.

Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale

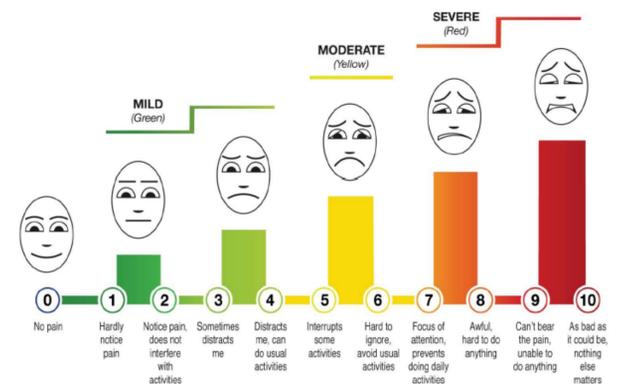


Figure 1. Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale[®] v.2.0

Results

In addition to the survey results in Figures 2 and 3, the student massage therapists surveyed (80% response rate) reported that the DVPRS[®] was easy to use (93% all or most of the time), communication with clients regarding pain improved (61%), and use of this tool allowed for tracking of pain patterns (64%). Students liked the functional descriptions for each pain score as well as the colors, and faces. All of the students who used this tool recommend its use by other massage therapists. However, 8/52 survey respondents indicated that they did not use the DVPRS[®] due to time constraints.

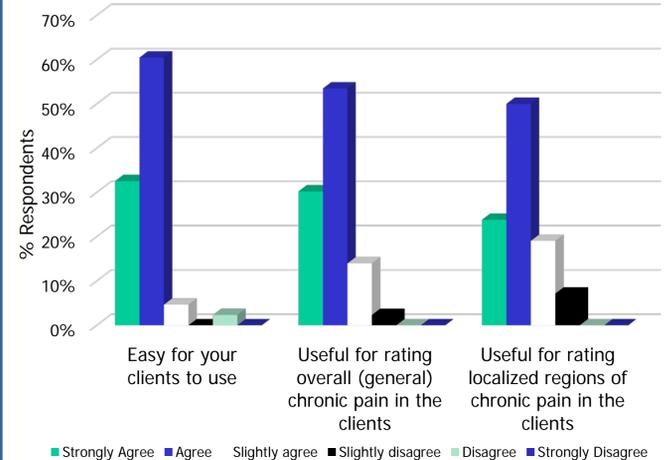


Figure 2. Effectiveness of DVPRS[®] - ease of use, useful for rating general and localized pain

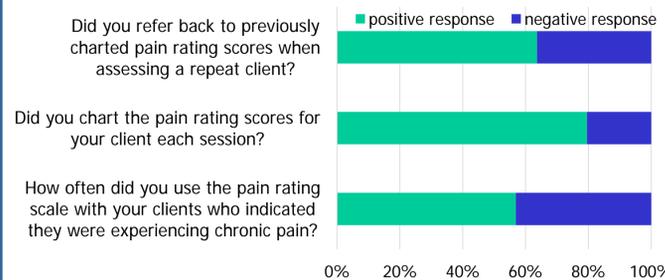


Figure 3. Student therapist use of the DVPRS[®] with clients (Likert scale responses ranging from always to never)

DVPRS[®] Student Comments

- It helped me to reconsider massage therapy's abilities - perhaps it cannot eliminate a client's pain but maybe function/ activity is less affected and they sleep more through the night.
- Helped with the interview process
- Helpful to show progress to clients later in their Rx
- It's useful to have everyone using the same scale so there is consistency within the profession
- It helps us as therapists with a baseline measure
- Easy to apply into to (sic) graphs for case reports
- Motivated them to do their homecare

Discussion

Changing long-standing assessment practices within a profession can be slow, but starting with massage therapy students is one approach. The students who chose to use the DVPRS[®] and complete the survey found it easy to use and recommend it to other massage therapists as part of their assessment process. Interestingly, the students who chose not to respond to the survey or indicated in the survey that they did not use it came from a large diploma program with many staff members who were reluctant to use the DVPRS[®] themselves. The students from the 3-year degree program (with a strong research component) not only used the DVPRS[®] regularly, but also suggested its use for case studies. Collecting this type of pain data could more effectively communicate the benefits of massage therapy to insurance providers.

Future goals include promotion of this pain-rating tool to all massage therapists!

Acknowledgements

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