INTRODUCTION

The literature highlights many advantages in the use of Massage Therapy (MT) by breast cancer patients, suggesting its value in long-term Treatment-Related Symptoms (TRS) management. Although MT has been shown to provide positive results in managing TRS, the studies conducted so far present a considerable number of gaps and are primarily focused on cancer population in treatment with less focus on survivors’ population. 1-3

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of this study are to present evidence on MT as a TRS reduction strategy and its immune response-stimulating effects in breast cancer survivors, as well as to present the current gaps and limitations of research in this arena.

METHODS

Design: A literature review was undertaken using the Evidence-Based Practice approach and the Psychoneuroimmunology model as the theoretical frameworks (Figure 1).

Databases: Databases: LILACS, EMBASE, CINAHL, PubMed and the Cochrane Library.

Criteria: Inclusion criteria were full-text articles available in English, Spanish or Portuguese and published in the last 20 years (1981-2016).

RESULTS

After selection, 12 clinical trials were retained for critical appraisal on methodological quality.

Biological effects of Massage Therapy:
- Iga Levels 1,4
- Alpha-amylase 2,4, 5
- Salivary Cortisol 4, 6, 7
- Salivary Flow Rate 7
- Serum Cortisol 8
- NK Cells 7, 9
- Lymphocytes 7, 9
- Urinary Catecholamines 7, 9
- Th1 Molecules (IL-1, IFN-γ) 9
- Th2 (IL-4, IL-10) 9
- Peripheral Blood Mononuclear Cell 9
- Hemodynamic Effects 1, 2
- Dopamine and Serotonin 1, 2, 9

Most tested protocols include:
- Aromatherapy massage 11
- Effleurage massage 12
- Light pressure effleurage massage 12
- Scalp massage 6
- Reflexology 13
- Lymphatic drainage therapy 14
- Massage combined with trigger point therapy and acupressure techniques 15
- Meditation and massage 16
- Massage and exercise 16

Focus on survivor population: preliminary evidence is not specifically focused on breast cancer survivors.

Biological effects: The few studies that have explored the biological effects of MT have not addressed the circadian rhythm of the biological markers investigated. 4, 12

CONCLUSION

Overall, MT showed a positive impact on stress levels, low back pain, muscle pain, sleep, blood pressure, heart rate, inflammatory markers and mood improvement in cancer population.

REFERENCES