

Next Steps for the Massage Therapy Foundation Research Agenda

Ann Blair Kennedy, LMT, BCTMB, DrPH, Executive Editor/Editor-in-Chief, IJTMB

University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, Greenville, SC, USA

Foundational to any health profession is the seeking of new knowledge based upon, and guided by, scientific inquiry. To determine what new knowledge is most needed, stakeholders will often create research agendas to guide the path of future research. This editorial introduces the Massage Therapy Foundation’s 2020 Research Agenda, and invites readers to provide input into the prioritization of objectives and goals within the Agenda.

KEY WORDS: massage; goals; health occupations; research; survey

To determine which areas of investigation require more knowledge, stakeholders will come together to create research agendas. These research agendas are used to help outline and guide future inquiry to help reach both short- and long-term goals for a group or profession. Generally, these agendas are thought to be living documents that will change

over time.⁽¹⁾ The first American Massage Therapy Research Agenda in 1999⁽²⁾ set a path forward for future research endeavors to advance the knowledge about how and why massage therapy works, how it is practiced, and how best to educate future massage therapists and massage therapy researchers.

Over the course of time there has been a remarkable growth in the area of massage therapy research. Searching PubMed using the Medical Science Heading (MeSH) hierarchical term “massage” yields some interesting findings. Massage as cited as a MeSH term in the PubMed database first appears in 1945. From 1945 to 1998, a 53-year time span, there were a total of 2,432 papers that were published (Figure 1). From 1999 to mid-September 2020, 3,734 papers were published and indexed in PubMed. In just 21 years, less than half the amount of time previously, the scientific community has increased the knowledge about massage by 1.5 times (Figure 1).

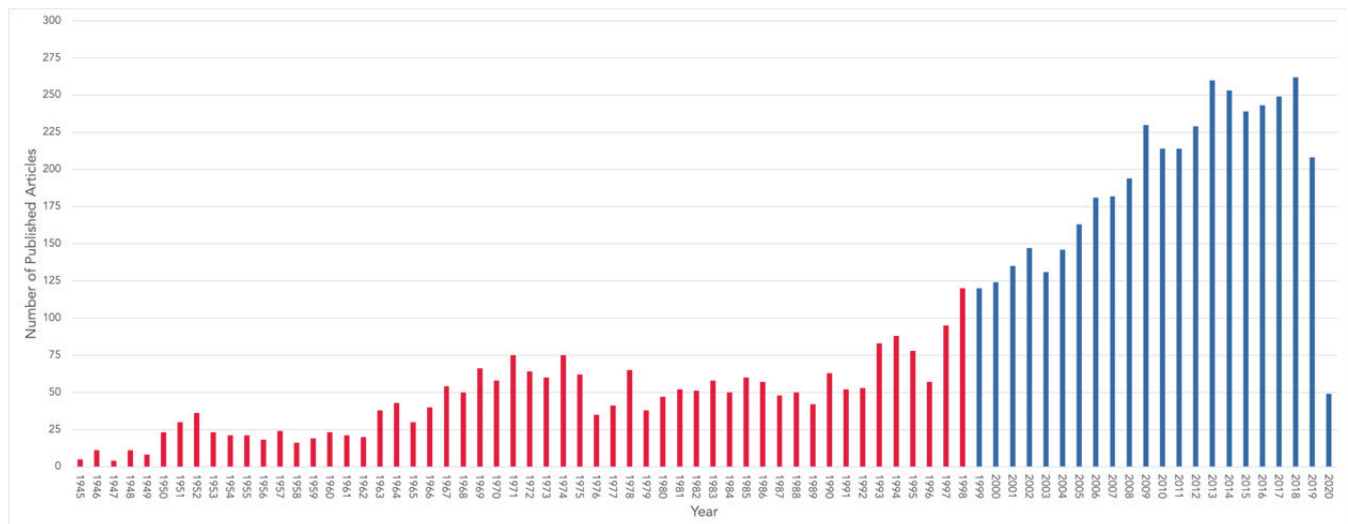


FIGURE 1. Number of papers published in PubMed using MeSH term Massage (MeSH Unique ID D008405) from 1945–2020; red bars are from 1945–1998, blue bars are from 1999–2020.

It is now up to this community, the massage therapy practitioners, researchers, funders, and other stakeholders to determine the next best steps for the future direction of massage therapy research. This process has begun with the publication of the first of a series of papers focused on the next research agenda for the Massage Therapy Foundation. Here in this issue, you will find the article “A Research Agenda for the Massage Therapy Profession: a Report from the Massage Therapy Foundation”.⁽³⁾ This first paper outlines the objectives and goals of the agenda. In the coming year, we will present to you a more in-depth investigation into each of the presented objectives and goals within the agenda, to further explore past research on the topic and endeavor to imagine a future based upon new knowledge created from systematic scientific inquiry.

Now we seek your input. After reading the Research Agenda, we invite you to participate in a brief survey. In this survey we invite you to help prioritize the objectives and goals in the agenda and offer feedback on why these are your priorities. We look forward to your input to help refine the course of this research agenda.

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Corresponding author: Ann Blair Kennedy, LMT, BCTMB, DrPH, University of South Carolina School of Medicine Greenville, 701 Grove Road, Greenville, SC 29605, USA

E-mail: ExecEditor@IJTMB.org