

# Your Services Are Sorely Needed

**With so many suffering from chronic pain and dissatisfied with allopathic treatment, is a new era of pain management on the horizon?**

**By Julie Engebretson, Associate Editor**



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released its 30<sup>th</sup> annual report on the health status of the nation, *Health, United States, 2006*. This document, prepared by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services for the President and Congress, frames a general picture of health and trends in health care utilization, resources and expenditures. While the overall health of the nation seems to be improving or holding steady in many areas, results from the National Health Interview survey highlight the need for appropriate management of one particular condition: pain. Pain was such a prevalent complaint among those interviewed, researchers devoted a special section of the 2006 report solely to this condition. Titled “Special Feature: Pain,” this section of the report focuses on pain as it affects various anatomical locations, including the low back, head, neck, face and joints.

As noted, the health of the nation continues to improve in several respects. This kind of improvement is attributable in part to the significant resources devoted to public health programs, research, health care and health education. All in all, life expectancy in this country is continuing a steady, upward trend. But as Americans are living longer, the question remains, “Are they living *well*?” Between 1999 and 2002, more than 25 percent of Americans over the age of 20 reported suffering pain, of any kind, that persisted for longer than 24 hours. Nearly 60 percent of adults older than 65 who reported pain indicated their pain lasted for an entire year or longer.

Adults 18 years and older were instructed to report whether they had experienced any of four types of pain during the three months prior to interview: low back pain, migraine/severe headache, neck pain, and facial ache in the jaw or joint in front of the ear. Respondents were asked to report only pain in the above-listed regions that lasted an entire day or more, excluding minor aches and pains. Low back pain was the most commonly reported of the four types of pain, the most common cause of job-related disability, and a leading contributor to missed work and reduced productivity.

Though the percentage of adults reporting low back pain has remained stable in recent years, women of all ages, race and ethnicity groups and income levels reported experiencing low back pain more frequently than men. According to a 2003 study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, more than 100 million people suffer from low back pain and approximately \$25 billion a year is spent in search of relief. This study showed that massage therapy provided better results and reduced the need for painkillers by 36 percent, as compared to other therapies.

The second most frequently reported chronic pain type in the CDC survey was severe headache and/or migraine. "In 2004, 15 percent of adults reported migraine/severe headache and 15 percent also reported neck pain. Adults 18 to 44 years of age reported migraine/severe headache pain almost three times as frequently as adults 65 years and older." The survey also revealed that severe headache pain was particularly prevalent among women still in their reproductive years.

According to an August 2006 study in the *Annals of Behavior Medicine*, people receiving massage therapy exhibited fewer migraines and better sleep quality during the weeks they received the therapy, as well as three weeks following their massage therapy treatments. Study participants who did not receive massage therapy did not fare as well in finding relief for their migraine headaches. Massage also is believed to increase serotonin levels, which help to regulate sleep, mood and appetite.

Overall, the prevalence of severe joint pain increased with age. The knee was the site of joint pain most commonly reported, followed by the shoulder, fingers and hips. According to the report, "almost one-third of adults age 18 years and over and one-half of adults age 65 years and over reported joint pain, aching, or stiffness (excluding the back or neck) during the 30 days prior to interview." Results varied also by race and income. On a related note, the number of hospitalizations to replace painful hips and knees has increased substantially since 1992 and 1993.

The prevalence of pain among U.S. adults also was measured by the use of prescription narcotics. The numbers are quite shocking. According to the report, “Between 1988-1994 and 1999-2002, the age-adjusted percentage of women reporting narcotic drug use in the month prior to interview increased by almost one-half, from 3.6 percent to 5.3 percent. During this period, use of narcotic drugs rose by almost 75 percent among women 45-65 years of age, to 5.7 percent; and by more than 50 percent among women 65 years and over, to 6.8 percent.”

The impact of pain, particularly chronic pain, is far-reaching. It can affect everything from one’s day-to-day activities and quality of life to the level of employee productivity at America’s most powerful corporations. Conventional treatment of chronic pain is time-consuming and often very expensive, particularly over the course of several years.

In a recent survey conducted by the American Massage Therapy Association, 98 percent of Generation X respondents believed massage was an effective way to relieve pain and 37 percent of those already have used massage therapy to ease and relieve chronic pain. In fact, pain is such a prominent health care issue that the 106th U.S. Congress passed Title VI, Sec. 1603, of H.R. 3244, declaring the period between Jan. 1, 2001 and Dec. 31, 2010 the “Decade of Pain Control and Research.”

As Americans are living longer, frustration with conventional approaches to pain management is evident. In fact, the CDC report speculates that pain among older adults often goes unreported due to many simply giving up, “and skepticism about the beneficial effects of potential treatments.” With so many Americans in pain and dissatisfied with conventional treatment options, massage therapists may have a real opportunity to take the lead in a new era of pain management.

For a copy of *Health, United States, 2006*, including the section, “Special Feature: Pain,” please visit [www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus.htm). For a copy of the 2006 AMTA Consumer Survey, visit [www.amtamassage.org](http://www.amtamassage.org).

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