



Mind body therapies in rehabilitation of patients with rheumatic diseases



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ABSTRACT

Mind body therapies (MBT) share a global approach involving both mental and physical dimensions, and focus on relationship between brain, mind, body and behavior and their effects on health and disease.

MBT include concentration based therapies and movement based therapies, comprising traditional Oriental practices and somatic techniques.

The greatest part of rheumatic diseases have a chronic course, leading to progressive damages at musculoskeletal system and causing physical problems, psychological and social concerns. Thus, rheumatic patients need to be treated with a multidisciplinary approach integrating pharmacological therapies and rehabilitation techniques, that not should only aim to reduce the progression of damages at musculoskeletal system. Thus, MBT, using an overall approach, could be useful in taking care of the overall health of the patients with chronic rheumatic diseases.

This review will deal with different MBT and with their effects in the most common chronic rheumatic diseases (Rheumatoid Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis, Fibromyalgia Syndrome).

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1. Background

The mind body therapies (MBT) use different techniques to facilitate the ability of the mind to influence body characteristics and symptoms.

MBT, despite their conceptual and technical differences, share a global approach involving both the mental and physical dimensions, and focus on the relationship between brain, mind, body and behavior and their effects on health and disease.

They differ from traditional rehabilitation techniques, as they are founded on a conscious work on the self, more than on exercise, and prefer to focus on the perception and relaxation more than on the physical work out.

These approaches, interestingly, allow the patients to become active and responsible towards the achievement of physical and psychological well-being, and to participate, under the guide of a physiotherapist, to the improvement of their own health [1].

MBT include both concentration based therapies (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Hypnosis, Guided Imagery, mindfulness-based stress-reduction – MBSR-program, Resseguier Method) and movement based therapies, that have a low physical impact, including traditional Oriental practices (Yoga, Qi Gong, Tai Chi) and more recent methods, such as somatic techniques (Body Awareness Technique, Mensendieck system, Feldenkrais Method, Pilates Method, Rolfing, Gerda Alexander Euthonie, Alexander Technique, Rosen Method Bodywork and Resseguier Method) (Table 1).

Chronic rheumatic diseases are painful and debilitating, systemic and often life threatening. Chronic Arthritides (such as Rheumatoid Arthritis and Ankylosing Spondylitis) are the most important and common chronic inflammatory and autoimmune rheumatic diseases, while Fibromyalgia Syndrome is a chronic, systemic severely painful and disabling condition of non inflammatory origin.

These diseases cause not only physical problems, but also psychological and social concerns. Therefore, patients affected with a chronic rheumatic disease should be treated with a multidisciplinary management, integrating pharmacological and non pharmacological treatments. The latter should include educational interventions and rehabilitation techniques aiming to reduce and to slow down the progression of the damages of the

musculoskeletal areas most involved by the disease process.

However, rheumatologic rehabilitation also requires a global approach, in order to take care of the overall health of a patient suffering from a chronic affection, not to treat only a district impaired by the disease or the whole musculoskeletal system. Therefore, priority should be given to methods, such as MBT, based on an active cooperation of the patients in reaching a psychological and physical well-being, and allowing to act not only where the disease process is more evident, but in a global way.

MBT, under the guide of an expert physiotherapist, educate the patients firstly to refine perception and body awareness and then to recognize and correct abnormalities such as muscle contractions and asymmetries of the body segments, to reduce painful or non-functional posture and, ultimately, to improve function [2].

In patients with chronic rheumatic autoimmune and inflammatory diseases, the link between stress and the immune and neuroendocrine systems suggests that complementary alternative therapies, to which MBT pertain, can significantly improve disability and pain [2].

Literature data increasingly demonstrate that MBT, with few side effects, are effective and useful in the rehabilitation of chronic rheumatic patients, especially in improving function, pain and psychological distress.

For this review article, PubMed, MEDLINE, EMBASE, and Cochrane Library databases literature were consulted to search for clinical studies analyzing the most used MBT approaches, represented by mindfulness-based stress-reduction program [3], Yoga [4], Qi Gong [5], Tai Chi [6], Resseguier Method [7] Pilates Method [8] and their effects in Rheumatoid Arthritis, Ankylosing Spondylitis and Fibromyalgia Syndrome. Both authors independently examined each eligible study and extracted data.

2. Mind body therapies and rheumatic diseases

2.1. Mind body therapies in rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic arthritis of autoimmune inflammatory origin that affects the small joints of hands and feet and also shoulders, hip, knee. The inflammation of the synovial membrane of the joints leads to articular painful swelling and causes

Table 1

Concentration based mind body therapies.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**
 - Single method CBT
 - Educational
 - Relaxation techniques (progressive relaxation, biofeedback, biofeedback)
 - Multimethod CBT
- Hypnosis
- Guided Imagery
- Mindfulness-based stress-reduction (MBSR)
- Resseguier Method
- **Movement based mind body therapies**• Yoga
 - Qi Gong
 - Tai Chi
 - Resseguier Method and Body Movement and Perception
 - Mensendieck system
 - Feldenkrais Core Integration Method
 - Pilates

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