

How Soft Tissue Instruments “Stack Up”

Henry Ford once promised an eager American public clamoring for his Model T’s, “You can have any color so long as it’s black.” – an unwitting reminder that people, in the absence of choice, are relegated to accepting only what is available. For the longest time, and due largely to a lack of any real choice, chiropractors were left to purchase soft tissue instruments on the basis of availability, not for their proven superiority. It was a decision by default rather than an expressed preference. Doctors hadn’t opted for bound sets containing a confusing assembly of tools, nor did they request instruments whose curves and angles fatigued the hand and maneuvered poorly. There was simply too little choice and, as with the Model T, “it was take it or leave it.”

No “One Size Fits All”

Things are quite different now. A wide variety of instruments – each with their own unique attributes since no one size fits all, and reflecting manufacturers’ motives both mercenary and altruistic – vie for attention as doctors and patients increasingly tout soft tissue therapy’s effectiveness. Left to their own devices (an unforgivable pun), healthcare practitioners ever on the lookout for a soft tissue instrument that best suits their and their patients’ specific needs are guided both by the technique they plan to employ and the instrument likely to best administer it. They also want to know what will best suit their budget, reduce hand fatigue, address patients’ health issues, and of course, what instrument and associated technique draws from, and is supported by, sound scientific principles?



Instrument	Single Multi-Use Instrument	Specially Formulated Emollient	Exclusive to Chiropractic	Outcome Integrated Protocols	Extensive Protocols	Hands on Training	Affordability
Adhesion Breakers				✓	✓	✓	3/3
ASTYM			✓	✓	✓	✓	3/3
ConnectX	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	3/3
Edge Mobility System	✓	✓			✓	✓	2/3
Ellipse Tool	✓						1/3
FAKTR				✓	✓	✓	3/3
Fibroblaster					✓	✓	2/3
Graston		✓		✓	✓	✓	3/3
Gua Sha						✓	1/3
HawkGrips		✓			✓	✓	2/3
Iam Tools					✓	✓	2/3
M-T-Blade	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	3/3
Narson	✓					✓	1/3
Scimitar IASTM Tools	✓					✓	1/3

* Chart Data For Respective Website (January 2014)

Shopping “Intelligence”

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission actually encourages this kind of comparison shopping, going so far as to urge advertisers to reference their competitors - provided that is - the comparisons are done with clarity and sufficient disclosure to avoid deceiving the consumer. As the Commission sees it, comparison advertising offers consumers the valuable information that will enable them to make rational purchase decisions.

That said, comparison shopping is only as effective as the criteria used to make sensible evaluations. What, in particular, is important to know about a product before buying it? Aficionados of soft tissue instruments will likely consider maneuverability, comfort, and the provision of a non-slip surface. Grip any instrument long enough and fatigue is bound to set in. Ergonomic features provide relief for both doctor and patient. Cost is always a factor – why pay more when a competing brand selling for less offers better performance, meeting or exceeding the practitioner’s criteria?

Protocol “Noise”

Protocols are key in the world of soft tissue instruments. Just as a Stradivarius violin will screech when played by the untutored performer, so too will a soft tissue instrument lacking sound protocols render lackluster results. Practice is simply not enough. Only through exceptional protocols imparted through tiered instruction will the dexterous hands of the well-trained practitioner achieve outstanding results.

“A Marriage” – Instrument, Protocols & Emollient

In order to deliver effective treatment, any instrument, no matter how well made, is only as good as its engineering, protocols, and means of instruction. At least one manufacturer has succeeded in folding instrument design, protocols, and instruction into a coordinated system of treatment. Protocols are continually modified as suggested by the feedback systematically received from field practitioners. Tailoring protocols to a select profession (the therapy is exclusively chiropractic) assures the data is uncontaminated and enables ongoing improvement. Features prized by chiropractors include an instrument’s durability, quality of materials so as to maintain shape and withstand environmental factors, and adaptation to specifically tailored emollients and hygienic procedures. As far as emollients go, several techniques now formulate their own for their particular instrument – achieving just the right lubrication, absorption, fragrance, and regard for clothing. It’s not uncommon to find a practitioner using one technique’s emollient with an-

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ConnectX Research

A pilot study provided evidence that manual therapy, including instrument-assisted soft tissue mobilization (IASTM), increased range of motion and grip strength in wrists affected by carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).¹

What Works

Preliminary data also indicate that chiropractic manipulations - of the cervical spine, shoulder, elbow, and wrist joints -, physiotherapy procedures, stretching exercises, and/or myofascial release techniques are effective in relieving clinical symptoms and functional loss in CTS patients who are candidates for surgical interventions.²⁻⁵ These preliminary studies also showed improvements in sensory and motor conduction latencies of the median nerve and increases in anatomical dimensions of the carpal tunnel as revealed by electrodiagnosis studies and MRI, respectively.^{4:5}

An Athlete's Ankle

There are also case reports that describe clinical outcomes with IASTM treatments. An athlete presented with chronic ankle pain, reduced range of motion, fibrotic lesions surrounding the ankle joint, and a medical history including recurrent ankle sprains, two arthroscopic surgeries, and physiotherapy.⁶ The athlete reported no pain, increased range of motion, and improved physical function following six to eight weeks of IASTM treatments.⁶ Although magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) did not reveal any anatomical changes to the ankle, the athlete did stop taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications.⁶

After eight weeks of IASTM treatments and stretching exercises for palmar adhesions due to Dupuytren's contracture, there were increases in active (11.5% and 57.1%) and passive (77.8% and 30.0%) ranges of motion of the 4th and 5th digits, respectively; photographic evidence of decreased contractures; and subjective improvements in hand function.⁷ There are numerous case reports on the inclusion of IASTM in multimodal rehabilitative programs for treating post-surgical anterior cruciate ligament or patellar tendon repairs,^{8:9} Achilles or high hamstring tendinopathy,¹⁰⁻¹⁴ anterior chest pain and midthoracic stiffness associated with acute costochondrities,¹⁵ lower back pain,^{16:17} and various other musculoskeletal injuries of the upper and lower extremities.¹⁸⁻²⁸

These case reports suggested that IASTM may promote faster recovery times, alleviate pain, and facilitate improve-



ments in joint and muscle function to “optimal” levels. However, comparative clinical studies were inconclusive on the independent or additive therapeutic benefits of IASTM.^{1:29}

Theory Driven

Despite the clinical data presented above and a small number of mechanistic studies on IASTM using animal models,³⁰⁻³³ clinical indications and treatment protocols for using IASTM remain theory-driven. The goal of our research agenda on ConnectX Therapy is to collect data that will drive our evidence-informed recommendations for treating patients with ConnectX Therapy protocols.

ACC Presentation

The results from our first research project entitled “Feasibility of Using the Patient Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System (PROMIS®) in Academic Health Centers: Case Series Design in Pain Reduction After Chiropractic Care” was presented at the Association of Chiropractic Colleges Research Agenda Conference,

Orlando, FL, March 20-22, 2014³⁴ and was recently accepted for publication in the Journal of Chiropractic Medicine. Within the limitations of a case series design, our data provided initial evidence on the utility of PROMIS instruments for clinical and research outcomes in chiropractic patients. We are currently implementing a prospective case series among private practice chiropractors trained in ConnectX Therapy. Within the Academic Health Centers at New York Chiropractic College, PROMIS® instruments in the domains of pain and physical function are now the standards for documenting patient-reported outcomes with ConnectX Therapy

More Coming

Our future ConnectX Therapy newsletters will highlight the most recent research on IASTM and update our research progress on ConnectX Therapy.

References

ConnectX Training: Putting it All Together

Having a great tool is one thing; knowing how to use it is quite another. That's why ConnectX has invested so much time and effort in developing a training series that teaches chiropractors how to get the most out of their ConnectX instruments.

Convenient

Designed with the busy practitioner in mind, ConnectX training consists of a webinar that can be accessed from anywhere and completed any time prior to the scheduled hands-on session which is held over a weekend so that travel does not overlap into valuable office time.

Comprehensive

In general, each module begins with an anatomical and functional review of the parts to be treated, with training videos and live demonstrations. Hands-on practice then becomes the focus, with instructors blending in manipulative therapy, emphasizing pre- and post-treatment procedures that include proper warm-up and rehab prescriptions for patients to take home. With clinical relevancy a top priority, the instructors provide numerous clinical examples of the types of conditions one would see in practice: tennis or golfer's elbow, carpal tunnel syndrome, sprains/



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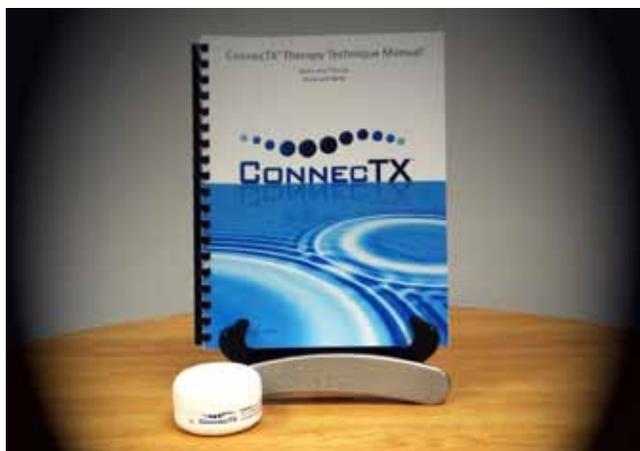
strains, plantar fasciitis, arthritic conditions, shoulder impingement syndrome, and sciatica, to name a few.

Certification

ConnectX certification is granted following passage of an exam consisting of both practical and written components. But the education doesn't end there; certified practitioners then have access to a portal on the ConnectX website that keeps them up-to-date on any new materials. They are now part of a prestigious group of clinicians who play a key role in the development and advancement of the ther-

apy, and ConnectX will promote them as a certified practitioner.

ConnectX trainings are conducted by, among others, lead instructor Hunter Mollin, DC, and John LaFalce, DC, MS Ed, both practicing chiropractors and chiropractic college faculty members. Feedback has been positive. LaFalce notes, "One of the things they seem to like the most is the hands-on aspect, and they have something they can take back to the office and use on Monday Morning." Mollin agrees, adding that practitioners appreciate the anatomical review and the integration of the therapy with chiropractic manipulation.



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other’s instrument, particularly when the emollient shows itself to offer superior characteristics.

So What’s the Right Choice?

There are as many right choices as there are techniques. It’s simply a matter of determining which technique and associated instrument best fits the practitioner’s criteria (and bank account). It’s often a matter of personal preference - a single multi-purpose instrument offers advantages in price and mobility. It’s also easier to supply clinics and individual professionals with their own instrument. Additionally, the single multi-purpose option sidesteps problems that plague sets crammed with assorted tools (such as accounting for each tool’s whereabouts). Assortment sets, on the other hand, may offer a solution to the practitioner who can’t seem to find a multi-purpose tool that feels comfortable - one piece in the set is bound to feel right. Self-evolving protocols tend to interest practitioners intent on staying abreast of soft tissue therapy’s latest successes. Instruction guided by the latest iteration of protocols will likely bring results that have eluded the practitioner for years. And emollients – access to the right one will deliver optimal results.

Clearly, we’ve come a long way since the era of single-color Model T’s. And while it’s nice to have options, we absolutely dread making bad choices. The bright side? We live in an information age – thus armed, mistakes are less likely.

ConnectX... For Peak Performance



Dr. Rick Rosa shares his success treating boxer, Tommy Thompson, and other renowned athletes with ConnectX in the following [video](#). Rosa authored the book “The Six Pillars of Sports Recovery: A Comprehensive Guide on how to Recover Faster and Outperform at the Highest Levels.”



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