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A systematic review of craniosacral therapy: biological plausibility, assessment reliability and clinical effectiveness.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The objective of this research was to review critically the scientific basis of craniosacral therapy as a therapeutic intervention.

DESIGN: A systematic search for and critical appraisal of research on craniosacral therapy was conducted. Medline, Embase, Healthstar, Mantis, Allied and Alternative Medicine, Scisearch and Biosis were searched from their start date to February 1999.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: A three-dimensional evaluative framework with related appraisal criteria: (A) craniosacral interventions and health outcomes; (B) validity of craniosacral assessment; and (C) pathophysiology of the craniosacral system.

RESULTS: The available research on craniosacral treatment effectiveness constitutes low-grade evidence conducted using inadequate research protocols. One study reported negative side effects in outpatients with traumatic brain injury. Low inter-rater reliability ratings were found.

CONCLUSIONS: This systematic review and critical appraisal found insufficient evidence to support craniosacral therapy. Research methods that could conclusively evaluate effectiveness have not been applied to date.