Craniosacral Therapy in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
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Problem:
Families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)/sensory integration (SI) are among the highest consumers of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) treatments, including Craniosacral Therapy (CST). Seventy four percent of families who report use of CAM treatments are using it for children who are autistic. Although families look to physicians to find alternative treatments, physicians may lack openness to understanding these therapies and engaging parents in discussing CAM treatments. Thus parents try CAM therapies with little information and without sharing CAM results with their physicians.

Evidence:
There is no definitive evidence of the effectiveness of CST for children with ASD/SI. There is some evidence to support the use of massage therapy, often used in conjunction with CST, to improve behavior and sleep issues. Several published reports from providers who practice CST as well as the author’s clinical experience describe improvements in behavior, anxiety and ability to focus following regular treatments of CST.

Strategy:
Identify and implement tools to measure effects of regular CST treatments on behavior in children with ASD/SI.

Practice Change & Evaluation:
Standardize the use of pre- and post-evaluation tool. Through a questionnaire, capture parents'/teachers’ observations of behaviors that they attribute to CST.

Results:
Present preliminary data on clinical outcomes associated with CST compared to patient status prior to regular treatment.

Recommendations:
The clinical use of standardized evaluation tools will provide preliminary data to guide future research.

Lessons Learned:
Lack of research demonstrates the challenges of determining the effectiveness of CST. Families seek CST to improve children’s ability to learn, socially interact and feel well. Families need guidance in finding safe and effective CAM therapies. More research is needed to provide this guidance and must be rigorous while accounting for the therapeutic relationship dynamic that is integral to the philosophy of integrative care.

Bibliography


