

Randomized trial finds therapies for spine pain improved quality of life but did not decrease health care spending

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Pain in the back or the neck is extremely common and accounts for more health care spending than any other health condition. A study led

by investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital, a founding member of the Mass General Brigham health care system, compared two non-invasive interventions for treating spine pain, assessing both how well these methods worked at reducing pain and whether either method reduced spine-related health care spending.

In a clinical trial of 2,971 participants, patients with spine [pain](#) were randomized to receive usual care or one of two interventions. The first intervention used the identify, coordinate and enhance (ICE) model, in which patients receive specialized counseling, [physical therapy](#) and a specialist in [pain medicine](#) or psychiatry consults with their primary care physician. The second intervention was individualized postural therapy (IPT), a technique that attempts to realign and rebalance spinal muscles to relieve pain.

Compared to usual care, both interventions provided a small but significant improvement in pain-related disability after three months. These changes were sustained and clinically meaningful at 12 months, long after the interventions were over. Both interventions reduced resource utilization (such as [diagnostic imaging](#), procedures, and specialist visits).

Overall, the ICE intervention lowered spine-related spending by \$139 per person compared to usual care ($p=0.04$), although this difference was not statically significant at the threshold used in the trial. Spine-related spending for the IPT intervention was significantly higher than usual care.

"Both methods examined in this clinical trial led to small but meaningful reductions in pain-related disability," said corresponding author Niteesh Choudhry, MD, Ph.D., executive director for BWH's Center for Healthcare Delivery Sciences and a practicing hospitalist. "Given the high cost of spine-related health care spending, it is critically important

to find cost-effective ways to effectively improve [pain management](#)."

The study is published in the journal *JAMA*.

More information: Niteesh K. Choudhry et al, Effect of a Biopsychosocial Intervention or Postural Therapy on Disability and Health Care Spending Among Patients With Acute and Subacute Spine Pain, *JAMA* (2022). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2022.22625](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2022.22625)

Provided by Brigham and Women's Hospital

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