

Book Review



Making Sense of Research: A Guide to Research Literacy for Complementary Practitioners

By Martha Brown Menard, Ph.D., 2003
(Curties-Overzet Publications, Toronto, Ontario, 1-888-649-5411
[www.sutherland-chan.com/copi],
softcover, \$21.95 Canadian, \$15.95 U.S.,
ISBN 0-9685256-3-6)

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Martha Brown Menard's book *Making Sense of Research* has arrived at just the right time to assist the field of massage therapy as it faces major changes. The profession is moving to establish evidence-based criteria for practice, guidelines for mutually agreed upon best practices, and a high quality body of research literature. In addition, with COMTA's encouragement, competency in research literacy is becoming a common goal in massage schools.

This transition is a formidable task for our profession, given that so few of us have the requisite tools to undertake it. Brown Menard demonstrates a profound understanding of scientific research and massage therapy. This combination is rare and exactly what is needed to aid our progress.

In the introduction Brown Menard

makes the case for the importance of research literacy for us as practitioners and as health care consumers. She maintains that, in addition to being intellectually stimulating, research will: help place massage therapy on a par with other, more established, medical professions; support the theoretical foundation of the discipline and lay the groundwork for further development of the profession; increase a massage practitioner's ability to distinguish useful from useless treatments; and help therapists provide the best possible care for their clients.

The major contribution of the book is the material on how to increase research literacy. For an instructor working with introductory level students this material will be extremely helpful. The chapters on Locating Journal Articles, Types of Journal Articles and Study Designs, The Anatomy of a Journal Article, How to Read a Quantitative Article, Critical Evaluation of Two Intervention Studies, and How to Read a Qualitative Article are very clear, to the point and readily comprehensible. The student or practitioner can read these chapters and make significant headway on his or her own.

Each chapter has clearly stated learning objectives, critical evaluation questions and suggested exercises. These are easily adapted to both self-study and teacher-guided instruction, and to classroom or Internet discussion format. A selection of several articles representing different types of research is presented with critical analysis of each. It would be easy for instructors to provide additional articles for use in classroom discussion. It might be helpful to have more examples of qualitative research, because this type of research methodology has such ready application to massage therapy.

The book is loaded with information about research that will help the beginner. Brown Menard covers the components of a research article and the types of research studies in a very accessible way. She explains such concepts as internal validity, external validity, and model fit validity.

She gives clear examples of each and discusses their special importance for massage therapy research. She discusses the need for controls, sampling issues, and problems of research that are unique to massage therapy. There is a helpful glossary.

I do think this invaluable book would have benefited from a few additions. A fuller discussion of the role of research questions and strategies for developing them might increase the reader's appreciation of the effort involved in formulating good research questions and hypotheses. Good studies depend on good research questions. The glossary would benefit from the addition of the following terms: variable, dependent variable, and independent variable, with examples of each.

Since most massage therapists have little or no background in statistics, and many even fear and distrust them, I would also have liked to see a sort of primer in statistics at the outset, or a separate appendix covering statistical concepts, with several illustrative, everyday examples.

In the debate about the value of research for massage therapy, what is rarely stated is that research can be fun. To begin each chapter, Brown Menard has selected quotes from the eminent biologist Sir Peter Medawar, which capture some of the spirit of openness and delight in the world that can be found in science. "A scientist is, then, a seeker after truth. The truth is that which he reaches out for, the direction toward which his face is turned. Complete certainty is beyond his reach, though, and many questions to which he would like answers lie outside the universe of discourse of natural science."

"Doing science" follows in the best tradition of the massage pioneers of the nineteenth century and will enhance our standing in our communities. We have an enormous amount of work to do. Martha Brown Menard's book clearly marks a part of the trail we are to follow. @