

The effectiveness of nurse-delivered aromatherapy in an acute care setting

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OBJECTIVE:

To examine the use and effectiveness of essential oil therapeutic interventions on pain, nausea, and anxiety, when provided by nurses to patients in acute hospital settings across a large health system. This study expands upon the limited body of literature on aromatherapy use among inpatients.

DESIGN:

Retrospective, effectiveness study using data obtained from electronic health records.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:

Change in patient-reported pain, anxiety, and nausea, rated before and after receiving aromatherapy using a numeric rating scale (0-10).

RESULTS:

There were 10,262 hospital admissions during the study time frame in which nurse-delivered aromatherapy was part of patient care. The majority of admissions receiving aromatherapy were females (81.71%) and white (87.32%). Over 75% of all aromatherapy sessions were administered via inhalation. Lavender had the highest absolute frequency (49.5%) of use regardless of mode of administration, followed by ginger (21.2%), sweet marjoram (12.3%), mandarin (9.4%), and combination oils (7.6%). Sweet marjoram resulted in the largest single oil average pain change at -3.31 units (95% CI: -4.28, -2.33), while lavender and sweet marjoram had equivalent average anxiety changes at -2.73 units, and ginger had the largest single oil average change in nausea at -2.02 units (95% CI: -2.55, -1.49).

CONCLUSIONS:

Essential oils generally resulted in significant clinical improvements based on their intended use, although each oil also showed ancillary benefits for other symptoms. Future research should explore use of additional essential oils, modes of administration, and different patient populations.

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