EBAT for the Musculoskeletal Client

Watsu®

Definition
Watsu is a form of passive aquatic therapy modeled after the principles of Zen Shiatsu. Watsu is always performed in a hands-on manner by the provider. The client is usually held or cradled in warm water while the provider stabilizes or moves one segment of the body, resulting in a stretch of another segment due to the drag effect. The client remains completely passive while the provider combines the unique qualities of the water with rhythmic flow patterns which attempt to facilitate improvements in the body's neurologic, musculoskeletal, cardiorespiratory, metabolic and psychosocial systems. [1]

Reimbursement
Assuming medical necessity, Watsu performed by a licensed provider in a 1:1 manner with a client should be coded with the aquatic therapy code (97113). Watsu cannot be performed with more than one client at a time and thus cannot be coded with a group therapy code.

Research
Chon (2009)[2] reports the effect of Watsu as rehabilitation method for hemiparetic patients with stroke. They examined what would occur if Watsu treatments were performed 5x/week for 8 weeks, delivered underwater or at water surface level. All patients showed decreased scores in the Tone Assessment Scale (TAS) and Rivermead Visual Gait Assessment (RVGA) after Watsu application. Watsu was helpful in controlling spasticity and improving ambulatory function of the patients with hemiparesis.

Pastrello (2009)[3] investigated the efficacy of the Watsu technique as a complementary tool in the physical therapy treatment of a child with spastic tetraplegia cerebral palsy. Assessment occurred three times on the child; the first assessment occurred in the beginning of the study; the second assessment took place after the intervention on the floor; and the third assessment occurred after Watsu therapy was applied. Researcheers found that Watsu therapy was capable of assisting in motor rehabilitation of a child with spastic tetraplegia cerebral palsy.

Wieser (2007)[4] published anecdotal findings from a series of case reports. The author examined the value of Watsu for children with severe and profound disabilities. The article outlines the implementation of a WATSU based aquatic program and notes the positive changes in behavior of the children.

Voqtle (1998)[5] examined the effect of Watsu and Halliwick on adults with cerebral palsy who participated in aquatic therapy. Caretaker reports of ease of care substituted for functional measures owing to clients' limited functional ability and potential for functional improvement. Outcomes suggest that the program was effective for improving PROM, decreasing pain, and providing a pleasurable social experience. Benefits were also realized by the students participating in the swim program, including skill development and appreciation of patients with disability as individuals.

Vargus (1998)[6] describes a case report examining the effectiveness of a combination of water-

based interventions (Halliwick Method, Watsu, Bad Ragaz Ring Method, manual techniques, and dynamic activities) on the pain and function of a 87-year old male, retired physician with a diagnosis of lumbar radiculopathy. After six weeks of aquatic physical therapy, the patient demonstrated a reduction in pain, an improvement in strength of ankle and foot muscles, improved gait characteristics, and a decreased reliance on his wheelchair.

Watsu combines unique holds and positions with dramatic flows through the water.

References

1. Dull H (creator of Watsu). *Personal communication clarifying definition of Watsu.* Worldwide Aquatic Bodywork Association: Middletown, California, USA; April 3, 1999.

2. Chon SC, Oh DW, Shim JH. Watsu approach for improving spasticity and ambulatory function in hemiparetic patients with stroke. *Physiother Res Int.* 2009 Jun;14(2):128-36.

3. Pastrello FHH; Garcão DG; Pereira K. Watsu method as complementary resort in the physiotherapy treatment of spastic cerebral palsy tetraparetic: study of the case [Portuguese]. *Fisioterapia em Movimento,* 2009 Jan-Mar; 22(1): 95-102.

4. Wieser, A. WATSU for children with severe and profound disabilities. *Aquatic Therapy Journal* Oct 2007: Vol. 9 Issue 2. p. 9-13.

5. Vogtle LK; Morris DM; Denton BG. An aquatic program for adults with cerebral palsy living in group homes. *Physical Therapy Case Reports.* 1998 Sep; 1(5): 250-9.

6. Vargas L. The effect of aquatic physical therapy on improving motor function and decreasing pain in a chronic low back pain patient: a retrospective case report. *Journal of Aquatic Physical Therapy.* March 1998;6(1):6-10.