**Are we in the NICE Guidelines?**

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is a public body that produces UK guidelines on health and care. Its work is to produce comprehensive reviews of the evidence base for different interventions or medications, and then from this to make recommendations. Through its recommendations, it effectively determines what interventions are used within the NHS, as well as having a wider influence within healthcare in general.

NICE has reviewed the evidence base for the effectiveness of Alexander lessons in two areas, and has made a recommendation for AT in one.

**Alexander lessons and Parkinson’s**

***NICE recommendation:*** 1.7.4. “*Consider the Alexander Technique for people with Parkinson's disease who are experiencing balance or motor function problems*.”

***History:*** The recommendation is based on the randomised controlled clinical trial and its pilot study conducted and published by Alexander teacher and researcher, Chloe Stallibrass and colleagues in the 1990s and 2000s (see *STAT Research Resource* for more details – available from the members’ section of the STAT website).

We almost lost this recommendation as when NICE conducted their last review, they removed the recommendation for AT from the guideline draft. The STAT Research Group (SRG) discovered that NICE was under the impression that AT is a form of physiotherapy and therefore did not need to be mentioned in the guidelines, as there was already a recommendation for physiotherapy. The SRG made a submission to NICE aiming to convince them that AT is unrelated to physiotherapy, and an intervention in its own right. The CNHC (Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council) also made a supportive submission. Thankfully, NICE was persuaded and the recommendation for Alexander lessons was re-instated in the final guidelines.

***Guidelines:*** National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Parkinson’s disease in adults (guideline NG71). Published: 19 July 2017. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng71>

**Alexander lessons and back pain**

***NICE recommendation***: *No recommendation made*

NICE has reviewed the evidence for the effectiveness of Alexander lessons for people with low back pain but has not made any recommendation due to ‘insufficient’ evidence. It is our view that the fact that NICE has reviewed the evidence, does not justify any claim that ‘AT is in the NICE guidelines for back pain’ (as is sometimes stated). Such a claim is misleading as it implies that NICE has recommended Alexander lessons for people with back pain, which is not the case.

Note that if you look in the main NICE Guidance itself you won’t find any mention of the AT, so to read about their analysis of our evidence base, you will need to look in the full document, *Methods, evidence and recommendations* (see links below).

***History:*** Following comprehensive submissions by the SRG to NICE for both the 2012 and 2016 updates of the back pain guidelines, we were successful in persuading them that i) AT is not a form of exercise (their previous assumption), and therefore it did need to be considered as a distinct intervention in its own right, and ii) to thoroughly consider all the evidence for AT lessons and back pain (ATEAM, ASPEN etc). Following their review, NICE concluded: *“While the evidence for the Alexander technique was promising they were not sufficiently confident in the effectiveness of the intervention to make a recommendation.”* Having no recommendation is actually not that bad (for example, NICE reversed their previous recommendation for acupuncture and now actively recommend against acupuncture for low back pain). Going forwards, for any chance of being included as an actual recommendation, we would need a second large randomised controlled trial of Alexander lessons for people with low back pain. Sadly, this seems unlikely to happen because of the difficulty of obtaining funding, despite ATEAM principal investigator, Paul Little’s best attempts.

***Guidelines:*** National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Low back pain and sciatica in over 16s: assessment and management (Guideline NG59). Published: 30 November 2016 Last updated: 11 December 2020. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng59/>

Methods, evidence and recommendations: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng59/evidence/full-guideline-assessment-and-noninvasive-treatments-pdf-2726158003>