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Study Published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* Reports Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment Improves Back-Specific Functioning in Late Pregnancy

FORT WORTH – For many pregnant women, it’s inevitable. As their pregnancy progresses, tasks that involve the low back often get more difficult. It is harder to bend over, lift, sit or walk for long periods of time, and back pain increases. Treating back pain, and improving daily function relative to tasks that involve the low back is a challenge because pregnant women are limited to treatments that will not create problems for their developing baby.

“Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) is a viable option for improving function related to the low back and reducing back pain in the third trimester of pregnancy because it does not appear to have any negative side effects,” said John C. Licciardone, D.O., M.S., M.B.A., the lead author of a study on OMT in the third trimester of pregnancy that was recently published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. Results from this study showed that osteopathic manipulative treatment slows or halts the deterioration of back-specific function in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Osteopathic manipulative treatment is a system of hands-on diagnosis and treatment that is used to reduce pain, restore range of motion and to restore normal function and balance in the body.

The Phase II randomized clinical trial of 144 subjects showed that women in the usual obstetric care+osteopathic manipulative treatment group reported less deterioration of back-specific function on the Roland-Morris Disability Scale than women in the usual obstetric care+sham ultrasound and the usual obstetric care only groups when these groups were compared using an intention-to-treat analysis. This study is the first randomized, placebo-controlled trial to explore the potential effects of osteopathic manipulative treatment during the third trimester of pregnancy.

In the study, conducted by The Osteopathic Research Center in conjunction with the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth, Texas, women were enrolled between the 28th and 30th week of pregnancy. After being randomized to one of the three treatment groups, the women in the usual obstetric care+osteopathic manipulative treatment and usual obstetric care+sham ultrasound groups received treatments immediately following each of their third trimester

prenatal visits. Women were excluded or dropped from the study if they were determined to be at high risk by their obstetrician. The median age for women included in the study was 24 years.

Dr. Licciardone noted that outcomes were statistically significant relative to improved low back function in the OMT group. “The results also showed a trend toward pain reduction in the group that received OMT, but pain remained the same or increased in the other groups.”

Usual obstetric care was defined in this study as the conventional prenatal care received during pregnancy. Osteopathic manipulative treatment is generally considered a complementary treatment that is not included as part of routine prenatal care.

“This study is exciting because pregnant women frequently experience a negative impact on their ability to function and perform tasks related to daily living as their pregnancy progresses,” said Dr. Licciardone, the principal investigator for the project, and the executive director of The Osteopathic Research Center. “Since pregnant women are limited in the medications they can take for pain, osteopathic manipulative treatment offers a way to improve back function and decrease pain in the third trimester of pregnancy, when a majority of women experience these symptoms.”

“What is also interesting about this study is that osteopathic physicians (D.O.s) who provide obstetrical care can potentially include osteopathic manipulative treatment as part of their prenatal care for patients,” Licciardone said. “For more than 100 years, osteopathic physicians who have treated pregnant women using osteopathic manipulation have claimed that their patients have less pain, better function and improved delivery outcomes. This study may be the first step in confirming the clinical success of osteopathic physicians in this area of medicine.”

Dr. Licciardone added, “If osteopathic obstetricians view this study as the first step in developing a strong evidence base to support the use of OMT to improve back function and pain in the third trimester of pregnancy, this study could have a significant clinical impact on prenatal care, and it could have important economic implications for treating common back-related symptoms and functional disabilities in late pregnancy.”

Full text of the article is available online at <http://www.ajog.org/inpress>.

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Resources Available for this Story:

A woman who received osteopathic manipulative treatment throughout her pregnancy is available to speak with reporters.

A complete copy of the journal article is available upon request.

The Osteopathic Research Center

The Osteopathic Research Center is the premier research center in the world focusing on the clinical efficacy and mechanisms of action of osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT). Located at the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth, the ORC also conducts health services and policy research by performing systematic reviews of the literature, conducting population-based surveys, and analyzing national health care databases to determine the unique practice characteristics of osteopathic physicians and to provide scientific evidence to support osteopathic medicine. For more information, visit <http://www.hsc.unt.edu/orc>.

University of North Texas Health Science Center

The University of North Texas Health Science Center comprises the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, the School of Public Health, and the School of Health Professions. Key research areas include aging and Alzheimer’s disease, cancer and forensic and investigative genetics. This year, the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine was named a top 50 medical school in primary care by U.S. News & World Report for the eighth consecutive year. “Fort Worth’s medical school and more” contributes more than \$400 million to the Tarrant County and Texas economies annually. For more information, go to <http://www.hsc.unt.edu/>