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Andrea Salzman, MS, PT  
Founder

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## What is Aquaticnet.com?

The Aquatic Resources Network (ARN) was founded in 1995-96 when a handful of my students started asking questions about aquatic exercise. At that time, clinicians were struggling to find a credible, international clearinghouse of information devoted solely to aquatic therapy. There was a real need to connect students and clinicians, companies and consumers. Today, I'm proud to say, we have grown from our original 30 charter members to thousands of therapists across the world. So join our members and share your love of aquatic therapy with PTs, OTs, CTRs, ATCs, exercise physiologists, kinesiologists, massage therapists .... and the world! Stop re-creating the wheel. We can help you be a success at what you love the most. [We are The Aquatic Therapy Command Center.](#)

*Andrea Salzman, MS, PT*

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PH: (715) 248-7258. FAX: (715) 248-3065. Email: [info@aquaticnet.com](mailto:info@aquaticnet.com) web: [www.aquaticnet.com](http://www.aquaticnet.com)

# Where Are those Stats?



Aquatic therapists are constantly looking for **statistics** to help them justify how **popular** aquatic therapy has become. So, where should we look to find the best **SCOOP** on water-based exercise and therapy?

**BY AT STAFF WRITERS**

**W**e were on a quest. Why? Staff members were tired of constantly fielding the same basic question from the public. The frantic phone call always went something like this:

- “We’re building a pool and I’m meeting with the bank tomorrow, so please tell me exactly how popular aquatic therapy is in the United States.”
- “How many therapists actually work in the water?”
- “We are manufacturing a new aquatic therapy device. What percentage of the population should I assume will want to buy it?”



## WHERE ARE THOSE STATS?



**MEDICARE.** Examining frequency of billing through Medicare is one way to examine the popularity of aquatic therapy.

Our nerves got the best of us and we decided to do some serious data searching. The good news? There's some data available. The bad? It's just a starting point for answering these questions.

### MEDICARE

Medicare. We figured we'd start with the big dogs and work our way down. Our question for Medicare: How often is aquatic therapy billed under Medicare Part B (outpatient) services in the United States? Even more helpful, what percentage of total billing does the CPT code 97113 (aquatic therapy) represent?

After hours of typing in inanities like "market research AND Medicare AND statistics AND 97113" in our Google search box, we figured out

where the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) keep the good stuff.

We found a document called "Top 200 Level I Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) for 2005" and — after much ritualistic prayer and fasting — were able to interpret the results. You can look up the raw data at [www.cms.hhs.gov](http://www.cms.hhs.gov), but why? Here's the meat and potatoes (numbers are rounded for clarity. For the actual numbers, see website or email authors).

The amount spent on aquatic therapy in 2005 was \$46 million. This amount was nearly identical to the amount Medicare Part B spent on osteopathic manipulative therapy (\$47 million), radiation therapy centers (\$47 million), certified clinical nurse

Frequency rank	Procedure code	# of services allowed	Allowed charges
#5	97110	33 million	\$944 million
#18	97140	13 million	\$356 million
#41	97530	6 million	\$183 million
#55	97112	5 million	\$155 million
#115	97124	2 million	\$48 million
#143	97001	1.5 million	\$114 million
#154	97113	1.4 million	\$46 million
#189	97116	1.1 million	\$30 million
All codes billed by PTs (in private practice only)		58 million	\$1.5 billion
All codes billed by chiropractors		23 million	\$772 million
All codes billed by OTs (in private practice only)		3.5 million	\$101 million
All codes billed in 2005		4.4 billion	\$108 billion
Aquatic therapy billing relative to all codes billed		1.4/4400 = .0003 = .03%	46/108000 = .0004 = .04%

**TOP CODES IN 2005.** Comparing the frequency of Medicare Part B billed services. CPT codes © American Medical Association.

## WHERE ARE THOSE STATS?

specialists (\$44 million), and surgical oncology (\$47 million). In contrast, Medicare Part B spent:

- 1.5 billion just on independent PT practitioners (not including inpatient care, rehab, skilled nursing facility care),
- over \$772 million on chiropractic,
- \$101 million on independent OT providers,
- \$1.3 billion on general practitioner visits,
- \$3.5 billion on orthopedic surgeries, and
- \$10.9 billion on internal medicine.

Providers were over 23 times more likely to bill for their services under the therapeutic exercise code (97110) than they were to use the code for aquatic therapy (97113). They were 9 times more likely to bill under the manual therapy (97140), 3.5 times more likely to bill using the neuromuscular reeducation code (97112), and equally likely to bill for a PT evaluation (97001) as to bill for aquatic therapy services.

The gait therapy code (97116) was used less frequently in 2005 than was the code for aquatic therapy.

Another resource we used to estimate the billing frequency of aquatic therapy is the BESS data for Medicare Part B services. BESS stands for Part B Extract and Summary System. BESS only includes data from Medicare carriers, thus it only includes information from therapists in *private practice*. Even though other practice settings (e.g. hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, etc.) are not represented, BESS is probably an accurate portrayal of over-all billing frequency.

Based on what we see through the

	2001 # of services allowed in year	2002 # of services allowed in year	2003 # of services allowed in year	2004 # of services allowed in year
Aquatic therapy code (97113)	525,569	735,073	781,807	1,014,400
Percentage increase from prior year	—	40%	6%	30%
All PM&R codes	18,192,933	23,660,694	27,789,816	36,698,359
Percentage increase from prior year	—	30%	17%	32%

**AQUATIC THERAPY BILLING FREQUENCY.** Data from Medicare Part B carriers on physical therapist (private practice only). Source: Part B Extract and Summary System (BESS), 2001-2004.

BESS data, aquatic therapy accounted for about 2.8% of all procedure codes billed to Medicare Part B by outpatient physical therapists in 2001, while accounting for 3.1% in 2002; 2.8% in 2003; and 2.7% in 2004.

So, even though aquatic therapy represents only .03% of all codes billed to Medicare *by all providers* in 2005, it represents almost 3% of all codes billed to Medicare from *private practice PTs*.

Therapists only use a handful (perhaps 30) of the thousands of codes listed in the CPT manual. The code for aquatic therapy is used 3% of the time to bill for PT services. This establishes a floor for how frequently aquatic therapy is used. We know it is used at least 3% of the time. But it may be

used even more frequently. How is this possible?

In the past, therapists could choose to use other codes in the 97XXX series (for instance, 97110) to represent therapeutic exercises which “happened” to take place in a therapeutic pool.

Medicare now asks all providers to use the 97113 code whenever services are provided in a pool. As this



# STATISTICS



becomes more universal, we will be better able to determine the actual number of billed services occurring in the water. For the time being, we can assume that *at least* 1.4 million services provided in 2005 could be classified as aquatic therapy.

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

There are no actual head-counts of numbers or percentages of therapists who work in the water.

But we can try to extrapolate the data from information we do know. For instance, we know that there were more than 150,000 physical therapy providers working in the United States in 2006.

Of these 150,000, only around 70,000 belong to the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). Of these, only 1,300 joined the Aquatic PT Section. Since it is logical to assume that every person who joined the aquatic section does work in the water (it costs \$45 to join; this weans out the casual joiner!), we can calculate that at least 1.9% of APTA professionals work in the water. Probably more. Maybe a lot more. But at least we know a minimum number.

Now let's apply that principle to the general population. If there were 150,000 physical therapy providers working in the United States in 2006, and if nearly 2% of them worked in the water, there were *at least* 3,000 physical therapists and assistants working in aquatics in 2006.

Now take that 2% statistic and extrapolate it across all the different professionals who work in the water. Out of all professions, physical therapists and therapeutic recreation specialists work in the water the most frequently. However, there are many other professionals who also work in the water: kinesiologists, occupational therapists, massage therapists, exercise physiologists, and athletic trainers are just some of the more common professionals to take their practice to the water's

edge. It would be reasonable to extrapolate that at least 0.5-2% of each profession works in the water.

## MARKETING STATISTICS

Another way to determine the popularity of aquatic therapy is to examine fitness, health and rehab trends. There are many companies out there which gather information about such trends. While there are no surveys which analyze the popularity of aquatic therapy, several take a gander at swimming or aquatic fitness.

### Trends in U.S. Physical Fitness Behavior (1987-2005)

American Sports Data, Inc. July 31, 2006. 289 Pages - Pub ID: AP1317817. Cost: \$375 Online Download. ([www.americansportsdata.com](http://www.americansportsdata.com))

Countries covered: United States. Based on primary survey research spanning more than a decade, this truly unique

report gives a complex answer to the simple question: "Is there a fitness boom?" This survey covers unprecedented 28 fitness activities (including aquatic exercise).

### IHRSA/ASD Health Club Trend

**Report.** American Sports Data, Inc. July 1, 2006. 372 Pages - Pub ID: AP1317779. Cost: \$575 Online Download. ([www.americansportsdata.com](http://www.americansportsdata.com))

Countries covered: United States. Based on national consumer surveys conducted in January of every year from 1988 to the present, the American Sports Data, Inc. report tracks and analyzes health club membership by demographics, frequency of attendance, activity participation, competitive facility patronage (YMCA's, corporate facilities, universities, military, in-home exercise, etc.) and membership fees. New, expanded report includes information on the rehab/therapy component of health club markets.

### The Superstudy of Sports Participation: Volume I - Physical Fitness Activities.

American Sports Data, Inc. May 1, 2006. 295 Pages - Pub ID: AP1284900. Cost \$295 Online Download. ([www.americansportsdata.com](http://www.americansportsdata.com))

A national consumer mail panel survey of 25,000 adults and children conducted in January 2006, by the publisher, American Sports Data, Inc. The total series monitors an

“ We can make the leap  
in logic to estimate how  
many clinicians work in the  
therapeutic pool. ”



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unprecedented 103 sports and activities (including aquatic exercise), with tracking data spanning 1987 - 2005.

### **Alternative Medicine: Current and Planned Usage by Mature Americans.**

Primary Research Group. August 1, 2004. 152 Pages - Pub ID: PF1032414. Cost \$1495 Online Download. ([www.primaryresearch.com](http://www.primaryresearch.com))

Countries covered: United States. This report looks closely at the attitudes of mature Americans towards alternative treatments such as chiropractics, Chinese medicine, and hydrotherapy.

### **Fitness and Recreational Sports Centers in the US.**

IBISWorld. August 1, 2006. 28 Pages - Pub ID: IBSS1332272 Cost: \$655 Online Download. ([www.ibisworld.com](http://www.ibisworld.com))

Countries covered: United States. This industry comprises establishments primarily engaged in operating fitness and recreational sports facilities featuring exercise and other active physical fitness conditioning, such as swimming.

## **CONCLUSION**

Medicare paid out almost 50 million dollars towards aquatic therapy services in 2005. Aquatic exercise has become popular enough to warrant its own category in surveys done by marketing groups such as American Sports Data.

Another sign that aquatic therapy is here to stay? There are over 14,000 individuals, facilities and organizations listed in the Aquatic Resources Network database (many listed on [www.findapool.com](http://www.findapool.com)). Each individual listing has some strong tie to the aquatic therapy industry. Isn't it nice to live in an era that is (re)learning to value the power of immersion and exercise in water? ¶



**ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE.** Find out from the Primary Research Group ([www.primaryresearch.com](http://www.primaryresearch.com)) whether seniors make use of hydrotherapy as an alternative medicine.

“There are now over **14,000** individuals, facilities, vendors and organizations on the Aquatic Resources Network database. All are tied **intimately** with aquatic therapy.”