Spa treatment (balneotherapy) for fibromyalgia—a qualitative-narrative review and a historical perspective.

Aim. To perform a narrative review of spa therapy for management of the fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS), evaluating this traditional time-honored form of therapy in a historical perspective. Methods. Medline was searched using the terms "Spa therapy," "Balneotherapy," and "Fibromyalgia" between 1990 (year of ACR fibromyalgia criteria publication) and April 2013. The Cochrane database was also searched. Publications relating to the implementation of spa therapy and related practices over the centuries were identified through references, searched, and reviewed. Results. Reports of balneotherapy were described from diverse locations throughout Europe and Asia, and various forms of water-related therapy have been incorporated for many musculoskeletal indications. In the management of FMS, spa therapy has generally been shown to be well accepted and moderately effective for symptom reduction. Conclusion. While achieving high-quality evidence-based conclusions is difficult for complex natural therapies such as spa therapy, the existing evidence indicates a positive effect in management of FMS. In view of the long history of this modality in the management of rheumatic pain as well as the inherent difficulties related to pharmacological treatment, the role of spa therapy should currently be recognized as part of a therapeutic program for FMS.