Your robot masseuse will see you now

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(HealthDay)—The backaches of the future may have a new remedy—developers say a robot masseuse is now treating patients in Singapore.

Known as Emma (for Expert Manipulative Massage Automation), the robot mimics the human palm and thumb and specializes in back and knee massages, according to its developers.

It is used alongside a doctor and massage therapist and, the developers said, "provides a massage that is described by patients as almost indistinguishable from a professional masseuse."

The device was developed by AiTreat, a technology startup company launched at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Use of the robot began Oct. 9 at the NovaHealth Traditional Chinese Medicine clinic in Singapore.

Emma has sensors that measure tendon and muscle stiffness and can calculate the optimal massage and track a patient's recovery over a course of treatments, according to the developers.

They said the device could offer a low-cost option for chronic pain management.

"By using Emma to do the labor-intensive massages, we can now offer a longer therapy session for patients while reducing the cost of treatment," AiTreat founder Albert Zhang said in a university news release. "The human therapist is then free to focus on other areas, such as the neck and limb joints, which Emma can't massage at the moment."

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More information: The U.S. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health has more on massage therapy.