



POSITION STATEMENT

CHARITY EVENTS & ORGANIZATIONS

In order to support the communities in which they live, the RMTAO strongly encourages massage therapists to become involved in community and charitable activities; however, to ensure the integrity of the profession and the services it provides, we encourage that community-related activities involve a means other than providing free massage therapy services.

The RMTAO encourages the profession to consider any of the following ways of providing support to their community:

- Volunteering their time on a committee or Board of an organization in their community;
- Participating in the organization of an event for an organization in their community;
- Working in the charitable environment by performing specific tasks for which help is needed, including such things as cooking dinner, runner errands, cleaning and general office duties.

For charitable organizations and events, the RMTAO encourages massage therapists to seek appropriate compensation at the day or half-day rate outlined in the *Schedule of Services and Fee Guideline*. Where appropriate and desirable, the massage therapist might consider accepting a charitable tax receipt as payment for services provided; however, this too should be in keeping with the information contained in the *Schedule of Services and Fee Guideline*.

BACKGROUND

RMTAO and its local Community Based Networks and affiliates, receive numerous requests from charitable organizations and events intended to benefit charities, to provide free massage therapy services to benefit their patients, donors or participants in the charitable events.

There are two related issues to be evaluated by the Board of Directors, including:

- Whether a policy is needed to govern RMTAO Operations (staff and Community Based Networks) on whether and when to become involved in seeking massage therapists in support of charitable activities; and
- A position statement to guide (as opposed to regulate) the profession in determining whether and when to provide their services, at no charge, to a charitable organization or

event.

This document is intended to address the second of these issues.

The question of whether RMTs should individually give of their time to local charitable organizations was posted to the Member Support Network for feedback. Among the questions posed was whether the RMTAO should be involved in such activities and whether RMTs should be encouraged to or discouraged from providing support local charities.

This matter should also be considered within the context of the Board's Ends Policy which addresses questions of community. In the context of massage therapists being prosperous and contributing members of society, the Ends policy speaks to having the resources and willingness to "participate" in their communities. Similarly, in the context of respect, the Ends policy speaks to massage therapists actively engaging in community building.

As a result, this position statement is an opportunity for the Board of Directors to provide guidance to the profession about what it means to participate in their communities and to actively build communities.

Based on the feedback on the Member Support Network, there are many reasons why a massage therapist would want to provide their services at no cost to a charitable organization or event, including:

- Building contacts within or getting their name into the community in order to expand their practice;
- A personal commitment to the "cause" the organization or event represents;
- Attracting patients based on those to whom the free services have been provided;
- Giving back to a community that has been supportive in the best way that they know how, providing the skills of their professional training;
- Other professions or clinics are doing so and it is needed to remain competitive;
- Any activity that exposes individuals to massage therapy is a good one.

On the other hand, there are many reasons why (based on the feedback on the Member Support Network) a massage therapist might not want to provide their services at no cost to charitable organizations or events, including:

- Experience of members seems to indicate that the effort will not likely generate new business, although the potential for contacts remains viable;
- The regulatory requirements surrounding health history, assessment, patient notes places limitations on the ability to support the short, charitable encounter, although some members report that they have created a waiver for patients to sign (it is arguable that you cannot get a patient to waive the therapists legal responsibilities under the RHPA);
- There is the potential for a conflict between the expectations of the recipient of charitable services and the regulatory requirements such that one expects "no strings attached" while the other is required to document and maintain records;

- There is the potential for harm to the patient in situations where an adverse reaction to treatment can occur and the individual was not fully aware of it, for example, an abused individual who receives treatment without having been fully briefed on the potential psychological impact of the therapy could react to treatment, causing further potential psychological harm;
- By giving the service for free, a massage therapist might be tempted to be less diligent in their efforts and provide less than the highest calibre of health care in order to address economic shortfalls from the situation;
- There are other means to volunteer time and expertise, such as overseas or in countries struck by disasters;
- Activities that expose individuals to free services reduces or removes the value of that service to the public and sells the profession short;
- There are so many charitable organizations asking for support that it becomes difficult to say no to any of them once you start supporting one;
- With so many charities asking for support and with so few massage therapists able to provide the help needed, the profession is faced with the prospect of developing a tarnished image of not wanting to help unless something is done on a broader level;
- Many of the massage therapy schools provide clinic and outreach components and the profession actively supporting charities may limit the ability of the schools to perform that function.

While it is not possible to prepare an exhaustive list, based on this feedback from the MSN, here are some considerations:

- Encouraging people to give to their community tends to lead them to do so in the way they know best, in this context, providing massage therapy services. Education is needed on why it may not be the most appropriate way and what other ways they can give back.
- The profession is “desperate” to educate the public about the benefits of massage therapy; however, the sense of desperation tends to lead once again to the “path of least resistance” and least cost. Again education may assist in this area.
- In general terms, giving a product or service away free reduces the value of it. In marketing terms, the product you give away or at deep discount rates is called a “loss leader”. That means that the owner of the product or service is willing to take a loss on that specific product in order to draw people into the market and buy other more expensive products at a higher rate. This is related to the principle of “up-selling” where you try to convince someone buying a cheaper product or service to buy a more expensive one because it is better for you. Both the loss leader and up-selling concepts represent significant issues in the health care community because it questions quality of service and leans towards conflicts of interest.
- What the other professions do is a consideration. There are examples of other health professions supporting charitable activities; however, most of those professions also tend to receive public funding on some level.

That the RMTAO Board of Directors adopted the above noted Position Statement on Providing Free Massage Therapy Services for Charitable Events and Organizations on September 22, 2007.