



POSITION STATEMENT

TELEPRACTICE

Background

Until the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated impacts of lockdowns on the practice of the profession of massage therapy, most massage therapists (RMTs) gave little thought to time spent engaging with clients outside of a physical treatment setting.

From March to May 2020, RMTs were instructed by the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO) to stay at home and cease physical contact with clients. Although the Ontario government allowed regulated health professionals to continue practice deemed essential, the CMTO issued a statement that its “position is that RMTs should not practice at this time. CMTO does not view the practice of Massage Therapy as emergency care”(CMTO, 2020).”

The overwhelming majority of RMTs therefore experienced a significant decline in income in the second quarter of 2020 which inevitably led to questions about ways to provide treatment for clients and continue to deliver services in non-physical settings.

Position

It cannot be ignored that our Scope of Practice states quite clearly that the practice of massage therapy involves the manipulation of soft tissue and joints. The question is whether massage therapy is limited to that definition given that services provided by RMTs encompass a diversity of treatment that extend well beyond the parameters outlined in the Scope of Practice.

Our Standards of Practice refer to many activities that are adjunctive to hands-on Swedish technique. Massage therapists cannot, for example, manipulate soft tissue and joints without first conducting a health history intake, performing assessment, proposing a treatment plan and asking the client for consent. Add to that the prescription, description and demonstration of remedial exercises or other forms of self care. And so it can be demonstrated that many activities performed in clinical practice by RMTs do not require physical presence in the same space as the client.

It is therefore quite possible that an RMT might deliver some services in their professional capacity separate to the hands on work of a treatment, and that these services could be delivered remotely. The RMTAO is of the opinion that an RMT should be permitted to receive payment for all services delivered by a massage therapist in a professional capacity and not just hands-on Swedish technique.

It is common practice that insurance companies reimburse payment for massage therapy either wholly or in part. In some situations a client is reimbursed by an insurance company for fees paid to an RMT. In other instances an RMT might invoice an insurance company directly on behalf of a client. Traditionally, RMTs have not described the exact nature of professional services on the receipts they issue. The description 'massage therapy' has been taken to mean hands-on treatment that aligns within our Scope of Practice, but that would appear to ignore other services provided by massage therapists in a professional capacity.

Note also, communication between RMTs and clients must always be conducted in such a way as to protect and maintain privacy in accordance with provincial and federal laws. Methods of communication need to be evaluated for security of privacy. It's also important to consider that services delivered remotely might originate from a different location than a massage therapist uses for hands-on appointments and as such privacy protocols might need to change or be adapted. There are parallels here with massage therapists performing onsite or outcall treatments.

Summary

The RMTAO is of the opinion that professional services provided by massage therapists are not limited to a literal interpretation of the Scope of Practice, and that our Scope should be read in conjunction with the Standards of Practice when describing the range of services that massage therapists provide.

Additionally, some of the services provided by massage therapists to clients can be performed remotely from the client, and massage therapists can both charge for those services and provide receipts for payment of those services.

This is not an attempt to re-define the massage therapy Scope of Practice, but rather to acknowledge that massage therapists perform professional services in addition to hands-on treatment and are entitled to receive payment for those services.

When deciding whether to describe professional services on a receipt as massage therapy, an RMT should consider whether those services fall within the Scope of Practice and are in alignment with the Standards of Practice.

Therefore it is the position of the RMTAO that a receipt with the description of service being massage therapy does not need to be qualified by the words virtual, or remote or in-person, and can include

services other than hands-on treatment provided those services fall within the Scope of Practice and are consistent with the Standards of Practice.

References

Massage Therapy Act of Ontario, 1991 (3) Scope of Practice
Standards of Practice, CMTO, January 2022

The RMTAO Board of Directors adopted this position statement in December 2021