



The Professional Culture of Massage Therapy

Although the professional culture of massage therapy has evolved significantly with the growth and development of different approaches and philosophies, the base principles held by the profession remain unchanged. It seems appropriate at this point in our history to re-affirm those base principles that unite the regulated health profession of massage therapy.

The professional culture of massage therapy consists of two basic components. These are:

- 1) A shared belief in a set of rules and structures that hold that culture in place and,
- 2) A shared understanding that any profession must undergo some conflict and studied negotiation where the shared assumptions and beliefs of that culture are negotiated, adapted, and changed.

As a regulated health profession, we engage in the rule of Credibility or the quality of being trusted and believed. Credibility is evident through our commitment to the professionalism inherent in a regulated health profession. The second is the engagement in Constructiveness or the quality of serving to build and improve. Constructiveness is evident through our commitment to lifelong learning and the adherence to the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario's (CMTO) Quality Assurance Program and the on-going regulatory requirement of educational excellence. These core tenets are further enhanced through the Code of Ethics ⁽¹⁾, an essential document that every professional health care profession provides as inherent guidelines for the members of the profession. A Code of Ethics provides a statement which expresses the primary ethical values, obligations, and goals of the profession. It is a commitment which serves to bear witness to our promise as a profession to uphold the values and ethical obligations expressed in the Code. The Code of Ethics supports the published Charter on Professionalism ⁽²⁾ which sets out three overarching considerations for professional practice:

- I. Client/Patient-Centered Care
 - a. Characterized by Responsible Caring
- II. Therapist Autonomy
 - a. Characterized by Responsibility and Accountability
- III. Social Justice
 - a. Characterized by Respect for the Dignity and Worth of all Patients

Included in the Charter on Professionalism are commitments and expectations. These commitments and expectations help to clarify each section of the charter. Together with the Code of Ethics, these two documents outline the core beliefs of the professions interaction with the public and other stakeholders.

The RMTAO understands that a culture must grow and develop and that therein can lie conflict and studied negotiation. Any healthy group or profession must adapt and grow so that it may thrive and meet the challenges of an ever-changing environment. This growth and adaptation must take place within specific parameters that are informed by our shared belief in a set of rules and structures.

First and foremost we are a health profession. As health professionals, we are responsible for specific requirements such as adherence to the Standards of Practice (3) as they are practiced, published and taught in the province of Ontario. We must maintain patient confidentiality, provide safe and effective care that is based on a clinician's judgment together with those of the client or patient. RMTs have a requirement to engage in subjective and objective assessment, which puts the patient at the center of the professional clinical treatment plan. Regardless of the developing delivery mechanisms, the care and treatment that an RMT provides is not purely a market service; it is a health professional service and must be respected as such by both the patient and the employer making use of the care provided by RMT's either as independent contractors or employees.

Conclusion

The profession of massage therapy is a health profession, and we share the common belief that we are primarily concerned with putting the patient's interests above our own by providing clinically indicated services for the purpose of enhancing and improving the lives and health of our patients. The culture of massage therapy is defined by the professionalism of its practitioners. They cannot be separated. Therefore, within our profession, negotiation as to the delivery of that health professional service is very clear. The delivery of massage therapy as a purely market service is not contained within that culture of a shared belief in a set of rules and structures and therefore presents as a deficit for the professional culture of massage therapy. This is not to say that massage therapy cannot be delivered to a wide range of individuals within the market; from the terminally ill to the healthy adult making use of the skills of the registered massage therapist in the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction. However, the shared belief in a set of rules and structures that support that belief are contained within the shell of the health professional.

Massage therapy is a primary health care option for musculoskeletal conditions/presentations providing care that is skilled, standardized, ethical, and conducted within the confines of a service delivery system specific to a health profession.

References

- 1) Code-of-Ethics.pdf. (1999, June). Retrieved May 08, 2017, from <http://www.cmto.com/>
- 2) Charter-on-Professionalism.pdf. (2006, September 08). Retrieved May 08, 2017, from <http://www.cmto.com/>
- 3) About-the-profession/standards-of-practice/. (2006, January). Retrieved May 08, 2017, from <http://www.cmto.com/>

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