

# The Canadian RMT Conference

Sept 25, 2020

Thank you Scott/Margaret

It is a real pleasure to be able to address you all today at the Canadian RMT Conference.

We meet today facing what will most likely be the greatest challenge of our era. This challenge is not just affecting RMTs; it is not just affecting Canadians; it affecting everyone in every country in the world. Some good news is the resources of the entire world are focused on finding solutions.

My message today however, is not one of doom and gloom but a positive one based on the very encouraging outlook there is for RMTs.

There are a number of factors all happening at the same time that allows me to say this.

**Right now** there is a huge demand for RMTs from employers. This is not just something that has emerged as a result of the pandemic but something that has been trending for a while. In fact you might say it is happening in spite of the pandemic.

**Right now**, healthcare in Canada and in most of the world is changing. It is changing to our kind of medicine. The old physician and hospital system is unsustainable and cannot meet the needs of Canadians. What is recognized and being consistently implemented, perhaps to varying degrees, is a population approach to health; to a focus on wellness; to a team based, integrated approach where independent health professionals play an ever increasing role in the health of Canadians. It is better medicine and it is a more affordable approach. The old expression an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure has never been more true or more necessary.

So what were some of the big challenges prior to the pandemic? – Mild to moderate depression, anxiety, and stress; keeping seniors active and at home. I don't think there is a person listening that doesn't understand the importance of massage therapy in helping treat these issues. And this doesn't mean that rehab and other areas will be any less important either.

Ok...So what are some of the lessons learned and challenges identified as we emerge from the pandemic? For one – there is going to be a tsunami of issues related to mental health. The entire

country just got a lesson in the challenges of social isolation and the importance of touch; For another – does anyone want to go into long term care or similar institutions after what happened over the past number of months. The answer isn't just hiring more PSWs or paying them more – although that is needed. We want to stay in our homes as we grow older.

In some ways the Pandemic has enhanced the value of RMTs and the role we might play to help society recover.

*pause*

At the RMTAO our goals are set by our Board. We call them Ends Priorities. We have six Ends Priorities.

One is that the profession of massage therapy in Ontario is recognized by the public, Healthcare professionals and other stakeholders as a valued healthcare option. – Advocacy

A second is to assist in efforts to ensure the profession of massage therapy in Ontario has exemplary professional standards, embraces ethical conduct, respects diversity and is dedicated to high

quality education. So providing education of our members and working with and supporting our Regulatory College and the various educational institutions is critical here.

A third is that the profession of Massage Therapy in Ontario has a credible and visible identity – this is not just advocacy but promoting the profession.

Another is that the profession of massage therapy in Ontario participates in integrated team oriented healthcare to achieve the best possible treatment outcomes for the Patient. – This is the emerging model for a wellness based healthcare system.

Another is that the profession of massage therapy in Ontario engages in a culture of continuous inquiry. Supporting the creation of future research that illustrates the many benefits of massage therapy in health care is one of our main objectives.

The sixth is that the profession of massage therapy in Ontario is prosperous, successful and promotes healthy practices. In many ways this is an outcome of achieving our other priorities but the RMTAO works hard to provide tools and support to our members to help them be successful. This was

never more evident than during the last 6 months with the supports we provided to our members.

The RMTAO has strategies for every one of our Ends Priorities. Implementation of some were delayed, as our biggest priority during the last few months was supporting our members deal with what was happening as the Covid situation changed almost daily.

But as mentioned, we are starting to adjust our focus to our more long term objectives and I thought I would share a few specifics.

### **Advocacy –**

Within advocacy there are 3 main areas of focus. These are: the health system and especially the health ministry in Ontario; the Insurance Industry; and supporting the CMTA in their campaign for HST exemption.

RMTs are an important part of the health care system. We already work well with other health professionals to ensure positive patient outcomes. Our advocacy efforts seek to make those successful partnerships more formalized, and help integrate massage therapy into even more aspects of the healthcare landscape. There is a greater focus in

health care in Ontario on a community based population health and a wellness approach to healthcare. This approach emphasizes preventative care, mental health and helping seniors remain independent, all through more of a team-based approach.

This represents an opportunity for massage therapy to make a significant contribution, and through our advocacy efforts we hope to open up those opportunities to more of our members. We also want to ensure that massage therapists are treated like all other health care professionals, not only by the public, but by insurance companies and by the government. This area of focus will inform all of our advocacy efforts going forward.

## **Education**

We are revamping our education programs with a new broader program of webinars and education sessions that focus on:

- Record keeping & charting
- Research literacy
- Evidence-based practice
- Patient populations (pregnancy, palliative care, sports massage)
- Additional modalities or skill review (remedial exercise, cupping)

- Financial literacy
- Business acumen
- Professional communication

We want to create more networking opportunities as well and focus the discussion of how to advance or move the profession forward.

## **Research**

One of my priorities this year as Executive Director, as well as one of the priorities of the RMTAO as a whole, is supporting the creation of future research that documents the many benefits of massage therapy in health care. But this is not something we can do on our own. The profession must work together to accomplish this goal.

There are many organizations that can help us in our plans to develop further massage therapy research whether that is providing funds or expertise, including the CMTO, program heads of massage therapy programs, and insurance companies among others. I have been speaking with representatives of all these important groups and they are all supportive and wanting to participate as we move forward. Also supportive is the Dean of a leading health care research institute in Ontario. We have discussed the ways they can help us in

supporting further massage therapy research in Ontario. I will add that there is a Broader National opportunity that the CMTA and other provincial associations are committed to.

One of the first things we are doing in developing our plan for the creation of further massage therapy research is commissioning a scoping study of all research related to the 'effectiveness of massage', and using that to inform our emerging strategy and further research efforts. The scoping study will be shared widely once completed. The process of completing the scoping study is just underway. We are also starting to bring together RMTAO members who have experience in conducting research, and they will be an important part of this process.

By supporting the development of this research we will be able to more effectively advocate to the government and insurance companies and further spread the word about the benefits of massage therapy, which helps support our other Ends priorities for the upcoming year.

*pause*

So in closing, I am not saying that the path ahead is simple or easy but if we are able to work together;

work hard; work collectively; we will realize our potential. It will take advocacy, consistent messaging and pressure to bring about change and it will take time. However, we grow stronger all the time because we are an important part to the right answer in the face of events.

It is important to support and belong to your provincial Association. Membership in your Association is an investment in your profession. Your Association is the group that will advocate for you. Now is not the time to be apathetic. Make your voice count, support moving the profession forward. You are important. There is strength in numbers!

We need to bring our voices together because Canadians need us; the health system needs us. Let's unite and move the profession forward together and make our voices heard.