The majority of interviewees agreed with the need for the development of a new professional body, to represent DQMT’s. Analysis of reasons why they agreed identified three themes: ‘greater promotion’, ‘create an identity and ‘perceived benefits’. Each theme contained several topics. The most frequently mentioned theme was ‘greater promotion’ of the industry and the degree qualification. Several interviewees commented on problems in self-promotion of their degree due to resistance from non-DQMT’s. One person was against the development of a new body. A small number of DQMTs were unsure and raised concerns regarding the development. Most interviewees noted a need for change.

Introduction

Massage New Zealand (MNZ) is the only massage therapy specific membership body in New Zealand (NZ). It has four levels of membership that relate to massage therapy qualification levels 4-7. The majority of level 7 MNZ Registered Massage Therapists (RMT) hold a bachelor’s degree qualification in massage therapy, which has been taught in NZ since 2002.1 However MNZ makes minimal differentiation in their RMT levels,1 and previous research suggests that MNZ may not be meeting the needs of degree qualified massage therapists (DQMT).1 It is 14 years since the first DQMT graduates entered the MT industry.1 It is timely to explore whether DQMT graduates need a stronger voice.

The purpose of this study was to determine if DQMT’s supported the development of a new professional body, solely to represent them: and if so, why?

Method

• A mixed methods approach
• Online survey (results in other poster)*
• Semi-structured interviews (n=28): telephone & face-to-face; thematic analysis; pseudonyms used
• Ethical approval granted by SIT Human Research Ethics Committee

Participants

• Massage degree graduates of SIT & NZCM
• 26 of the 28 were in clinical practice
• Mix of MNZ membership status (n=28): 35.7% current, 25.0% past and 35.7% were never members (3.6% unknown)

The desire for an identity

What DQMT’s want from a new professional body

Create an Identity

• Separation from non-DQMT’s
• Degree qualification recognition
• Recognition by other Health Care Professionals (HCP’s)

Greater Promotion

• Education of the public
• Regulation of the industry
• Integration with other HCP’s
• Help to gain ACC accreditation

Perceived Benefits

• Appropriate pay
• Support & advice
• Specific professional development
• Networking with other DQMT’s

Concerns / Against

• Conflict with non-DQMT’s
• Divisive within the industry
• Should be working together
• Externally detrimental to industry

Create an Identity

Chris: “As therapists or health professionals, the degree should be taken more seriously, as opposed to a health professional, or a massage therapist with a diploma.”

Alice: “In the massage therapist industry, we need to be working alongside and recognised by the health industry.”

Maggie: “I think that at the moment, we’re really lacking that public exposure.”

Susan: “I just think if you want to be more integrated with the medical world, I think that you kind of have to represent yourself with that distinction.”

Sara: “I keep quiet [promotion of degree] . . . the people who don’t have the bachelor’s degree don’t like us to talk about it . . . I think we should just help each other so I keep quiet.”

Jasmine: “It’s a new body! It’s a very good idea, because we’re not a regulated industry and a lot of people don’t know that. They don’t know that somebody can just put a sign on their door . . . with just no knowledge at all.”

Chris: “I think it’s a good idea, because it could help massage therapy industry to become regulated.”

Christine: “I definitely think that what has been done so far is obviously not working . . . there’s been lots of changes . . . we’ve tried to move forward but we seem to be getting stalled . . . there’s a lot of diversity in the massage realm . . . maybe something totally new needs to rise up that has a different picture, a more united picture.”

What DQMT’s had to say

Nicola: “you learn such a lot in that final year. You have got different education requirements for somebody that’d done two years. You sort of need different education opportunities.”

Lucie: “It would be good in terms of they can be there to help if we need or give us advice on queries that we need specific to us.”

Daphne: “we only need to have one professional body. I don’t think there’s any association for dentist or osteopaths. I feel like that really affects how other professionals see our industry.”

Alan: “I think it would be more beneficial to work alongside (MNZ) and to offer more to it.”

Implications

Whilst not reported in this poster, findings from phase one of this study*reported that the majority of survey respondents (87.3%; 48/55) would like to see the development of a new professional body exclusively to represent DQMT’s. The reasons for wanting a new professional body are reported above, namely, ‘greater promotion’, ‘create an identity’ and ‘perceived benefits’. The desire for an identity, greater promotion of the industry, and regulation have also been reported in prior studies.1,2 Currently MT is not included in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (2003), and is therefore ‘self-regulated’. However, the diversity within this occupational group (MT) is likely to hinder the development of a professional identity.2 Nevertheless, a conceptual model1 has been proposed that suggests a coalition is needed between degree-educated and a strong professional association to advance the massage therapy industry if credibility, best practices, and a professional identity are to be achieved. The findings within this study suggest that MNZ may not be meeting DQMT needs. DQMTs may require a stronger professional voice to spotlight their identity, separate from the others. In addition, DQMTs may need that voice if their level of education is to be recognised by a statutory body, given a recent study of MNZ members1 reported they favoured statutory over self-regulation. Care may be needed given the concerns raised by some participants regarding the divisive nature of a new and separate professional body. However, what is certain is that some change is required if DQMT’s want to advance their industry and improve their standing.

Limitations

• Lack of interviewer experience
• Time restraints

Personal Statement

This study provides further evidence of the desire for change by DQMT’s. A new professional body would provide the identity and ‘voice’ we currently lack, but the strength of a group is dependent on the support of its members. If we want to achieve our goals we need to take action rather than rely on others; but are we willing to provide the resources and effort needed to do so? If we don’t take responsibility for such action what is our future? More importantly, what do we stand to lose? Regulation of the industry is an ongoing topic of conversation and changes are likely. Without a strong voice and body to represent us, we will not be heard. Any chance of achieving the desired identity and recognition will be lost and we will have no influence on the industry we represent . Is this what we want? This is not the future I (JM) wish for myself, my colleagues, or my industry!”

References