What Determines Your Pay?

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New graduates often question whether they can get a job in their field of study and what they’re going to get paid. Within the massage therapy (MT) industry the questions may be how they’re going to get employed, their pay rate, and whether the qualification will be recognised by employers. New Zealand (NZ) massage therapists are predominantly self-employed in either multidisciplinary clinics or solo practices. Additionally, therapists can also be employed and contracted, but the pay system for these remedial massage therapists (RMTs) is unknown. General businesses in Australia acknowledge qualifications as a determining factor for pay rates. Similar situations are seen within the healthcare industry for nurses and midwives. Pay rates for physiotherapists in NZ are generally determined by years of experience after the entry level qualifications. The unregulated nature of MT in NZ makes it difficult to determine the impact a qualification may have on the pay system for RMTs. The purpose of this study was to understand how pay rates are decided by employers for RMT’s; and whether qualifications are included in the decision making-process. Ethics was granted by Southern Institute of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee.

Methodology

Survey phase (n=12)
- Quantitative phase.
- Snowball & direct email contact recruitment method.
- Excel spreadsheet with raw data generated, cleaned and descriptively analysed.

Interview phase (n=3)
- Qualitative phase.
- Telephone interviews up to 25 minutes duration.
- Employer pseudonyms: Lisa, Lea, and Claire; they employed RMT’s as contractors.
- Interviews recorded and transcribed.
- Key messages explored.

Inclusion criteria
- NZ RMT employees.
- NZ Employers of RMT employees.
- RMT employees hold a level 5 or level 7 MT qualification.
- 18 years or older.

Limitations
- Only includes RMT therapists.
- Findings may not reflect the larger population due to the small sample size.

Results

Figure 1: Combined survey data: Hourly pay rates for RMT employees (n=19)

Lea: “My guys get 40% and they get 60% if they do more than 15 hours”

Claire: “It’s a set rate...what happens is if they meet their maximum [hours]...early on...then their advantage...is they retain more of their earnings”

Lea: “If [my contractors] want a day off, I don’t want to be the one to tell them ‘no you’re not allowed’...I know they need to work...I think they’re a lot happier if they can self-manage”

Lea: “They don’t automatically get more because of [experience but] need...prove their worth by...doing the work and taking clients and that’s what will get them more money”

Table: Combined survey data: Influencing factors on hourly pay rates (n=12)

No-weak influence

Lea: “Even if their pay is sixty or seventy percent they’re still going to go. It’s not fair, I’m not getting enough ‘look at all this cream you’re making’ but there is no cream.”

Claire: “We don’t have to pay all the other things like holiday pay...a higher rate [for] GST on their earnings”

Lea: “Hayley does have a degree...but it actually more about experience...the longer they stay in the clinic, the more likely their hourly rate can go up”

Survey data indicated that previous work experience, qualification and further skills and knowledge appeared to be the most influential on the pay system. However, employers of contractors suggested that work experience was the most important to them. Employers interviewed also noted that staff were required to prove their capability to receive an hourly rate worthy of the influencing factors.

Discussion

• The majority of RMT employees were paid $30.01+. This was higher than the researchers (TW) employment experience and may indicate the value and worth of RMT’s is known by employers and reflected in the remuneration provided.

• Survey data indicated that previous work experience, qualification and further skills and knowledge appeared to be the most influential on the pay system. However, employers of contractors suggested that work experience was the most important to them. Employers interviewed also noted that staff were required to prove their capability to receive an hourly rate worthy of the influencing factors.

• Differences in pay rates between level 6 and 7 RMT’s is unknown and could be explored in future studies.

• The contractor format appears to benefit employers. However all three employers indicated they valued their contractors and aimed to create an environment where all parties were happy.

• Having a structurally and financially convenient format allowed employers to create autonomy and job satisfaction for contractors, which was important in helping to retain staff.

Implications

With self-employment being the dominant employment structure for MT, it was identified that employers aim to pay a reasonable hourly pay rate and try to keep their staff happy. This may install assurance that employees and contractors will be treated fairly. Also identified was that employers don’t take all profits, which may show current and future employees and contractors that employers have extra costs and overheads to factor into pay rates.

Future research

Investigating the remuneration patterns of Massage New Zealand members, including both relaxation and remedial massage therapists, and all qualification levels would build on the findings of this study. This research study also creates a starting point for investigating strategies for employers to implement in retaining staff from an employee or contractor perspective.

REFERENCES