Career Opportunities for BTSM Graduates in Invercargill

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Background

An increase in the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is evident. Therapies such as massage therapy, physiotherapy and naturopathic care are being sought by healthcare patients. This is positive for CAM therapists as the demand for qualified CAM therapists is steadily increasing both around the world and in New Zealand. With the increase in the use of CAM therapies, especially massage therapy (MT), it is likely that there will be an increase of career opportunities for massage therapists. Although there are many benefits to CAM therapy there is research showing that barriers are also present. Within New Zealand, MT is not an established part of the national public health care system, and it is not generally reimbursed by private health insurance companies or funded by New Zealand’s state-funded accident insurance company, the Accident Compensation Cooperation (ACC). This may decrease the demand for MT due to other health modalities such as physiotherapy being funded by ACC. Degree-based education may have an influence on the acceptance of CAM therapies, including MT, in the health care sector. The quality, meaning and value of qualifications is a major issue concerning the status of CAM practitioners in New Zealand. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of employment opportunities in the Invercargill region for graduates of the Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage (BTSM) programme.

Methodology

One on one interviews:
- Semi-structured
- Face to face
- 10 to 15 minutes duration
- Audio recorded

Inclusion criteria:
- BTSM graduate
- Working in Invercargill

Recruitment:
- Contacted via email in June 2015

Information sheets & consent forms:
- Full detail of procedures given prior to participation consent

Data analysis:
- Raw data transcribed verbatim, thematic analysis

Ethics:
- Granted by Southern Institute of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee.

Results

Strong Employment Opportunities

- Elite networking
  
  All participants saw networking as the most beneficial form of gaining clientele for their businesses. Most frequent methods of networking between all participants were:
  
  - Word of mouth
  - Personalised business cards

- Variety of opportunities
  
  Participants were asked what massage opportunities they were aware of in Invercargill. The largest opportunities were:
  
  - Self-employment
  - Sports
  - Geriatric

- Growth market
  
  Rachel reports “it always grows, but you do get drop offs at the other end”. She notes that the number of clients she sees can fluctuate depending on the time of year, expressing that in the last couple of years, during late winter and early spring her clientele peaks.

- BTSM creates a positive image for massage
  
  Participants agreed that an increased number of graduates in Invercargill would be beneficial for promoting a positive image for massage therapy as a collection. David reports “it highlights the profession as being acceptable that’s probably one of the biggest things.”

Some Challenges for Employment

- Work illness
  
  Massage therapy was seen by recent graduates as a physically demanding career choice. Susan reported that requiring work fitness was a barrier for her as a therapist.

- Business knowledge
  
  Participants reported business knowledge as being a significant requirement in regards to working as a massage therapist. David said “starting your own business is really daunting and you’ve got taxes, you’ve got all of your ins and outs of operating a business [which] is probably the thing that deters most people and becomes a barrier”.

- Need to have a broad range of skills
  
  Participants expressed their client’s coming to them for a range of conditions including relaxation, stress management, injury management, sports preparation and maintenance. Rachel reports “I see a lot of occupational overuse conditions, necks, shoulders, and backs would probably make up between 80 and 90 percent of what I do”.

- Competition
  
  Participants highlighted competition as being a significant barrier with Susan expressing “there is competition obviously, I mean there’s clearly competition.”

Limitations

- Having a small sample size means that findings are not generalisable to any population.
- The interview process has limitations with findings being both personal and subjective.

Key Message

Whilst challenges for employment are noted above by participants, the employment opportunities seem high for graduates of the BTSM, especially in a growth market, and with the good preparation a BTSM provides. Sports massage was the most frequently reported career opportunity due to the large sporting culture seen in both New Zealand and Invercargill. Geriatric massage for patients in retirement villages was thought to be an untapped area in Invercargill.

References


Image 1: https://www.hsunhours.org/2013/01/2/ways-to-broaden-your-career-horizons/