How to build a stronger collective for Massage New Zealand (MNZ):

Views of non-members

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Introduction:
Massage therapy is a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). There is a growing body of evidence for the efficacy of massage therapy for a number of conditions such as musculoskeletal pain, discomfort of cancer treatment, depression and anxiety.1 Massage therapy is the most common CAM therapy used in hospitals in the United States.2 Similar to the United States of America, massage therapy in New Zealand is a highly sourced CAM therapy and is increasing in popularity and use.3 However, despite the massage therapy industry in New Zealand attempting to gain legitimisation by establishing professional associations, defining scopes of practice, lobbying government, and raising educational standards the massage industry is still to date not currently regulated by the New Zealand government.4 Regulation is fundamental for containing the risks involved with CAM.5 Massage therapy in New Zealand is currently self-regulated via voluntary membership to Massage New Zealand (MNZ). There are currently 14 institutes in New Zealand running MNZ approved training courses, all each year generating massage therapists that would qualify to be members of MNZ. However a data base provided by MNZ shows that remedial massage therapist membership levels have dropped from 301 in 2008 to 265 recorded in 2012. With an increase of qualified therapists each year there is not a corresponding increase in the number of MNZ members. If the massage industry wishes to gain professional status and statutory regulation a stronger collective of therapists under a self-regulatory body may bring this one step closer. The purpose of this project was to explore what non-members needs and wants from a professional body are and to gain an understanding of why there is a noticeable disinterest in massage therapists to joining the professional organisation.

Role of MNZ
The majority of participants reported high levels of knowledge of MNZ such as: they are a professional membership organisation for massage therapists; they are trying to set a regulated standard; they run conferences, and they represent massage therapists with qualifications.

Participants were also clear that MNZ’s purpose or role was: a governing body that regulates the quality of massage therapy, they educate members and the public about massage therapy, they promote massage therapy, and they are a political voice for massage therapists.

Lastly when participants were asked about who they thought the most important members were within MNZ, results showed that participants in general know very little about the different levels of membership. After being informed about the different levels of membership and when asked who they thought the most important members were or where MNZ’s focus should be the response was varied; while some thought that the focus should be predominately on the remedial therapists, either diploma or degree, others thought all members were important.

Barriers to MNZ membership
► The first aid certificate
► Cost
► Professional development hours

“...it’s a necessity that you have it [the first aid certificate], probably for some people it’s a barrier; I mean it costs to sign up to Massage New Zealand it also costs to do your first aid certificate, it also takes time when you’re working with clients it can be a whole day or two days out of your week” (Dawn).

“The cost outweighs the benefits . . . I don’t think that it’s worth $250 plus needing a first aid certificate” (Kate).

Hours needed for professional development and accessibility to workshops were a barrier. MNZ could “have something that I guess online, something that’s accessible that people can do online to get those credits to maintain membership” (Mary).

Method
Face-to-face semi structured interviews (n=5)
Participants were recruited from the Southland and Otago area. Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes within the data. Results reported using pseudonyms.

This study was approved by the SIT Human Ethics Committee.

Benefits of MNZ membership
► Connotation with a governing board and giving one’s self a sense of credibility
► Networking
► Promotion of massage
► Pushing legitimisation

“The only reason I would join them is one; to know what’s going on in their organization and, two; to give as a therapist for example a sense of credibility of belonging to a particular group” (Mary).

“I think it would benefit me in the way that you can network with people and stuff” (Dawn).

“Promoting it [massage] to the general public but then also to practitioners who aren’t members to help encourage them to be members as well, just to push themselves and get a bit more out there, so that people are aware that there is a governing board” (Sue).

“I guess the real thing would be if massage was accredited with ACC or something we would all have to join up, but because its not, its free for all” (Charlie).

Discussion
While findings from this study were limited due to the small sample size, the data collected is still useful and has identified areas of investigation that may deserve further exploration. Participants demonstrated a good level of knowledge of the role of MNZ. They identified barriers to obtaining membership and saw little benefit to being a member of MNZ. MNZ could consider ways to overcome barriers to membership and ways to highlight the benefits of membership. This may assist a growth in numbers to allow greater resources to increase their promotion of massage therapy and give them a stronger political voice.

Strategies for growth
► Strength through growth in numbers
► Increased cost benefit
► Promotion of massage

“It’s a catch 22 situation, the more people that don’t join the weaker they become, the more people that do join actually increases probably their [MNZ’s] business and therefore their ability to promote massage so it’s a little bit of a balancing act” (Mary).

“Advertising so that massage is pushed, so that even the general public are more aware of how massage can benefit people” (Sue).

“A wee bit more education about what they are trying to achieve or what it actually could do in the long term . . . so that people are like oh ok I see that now, its not just something that I have to do and spend money on” (Dawn).

References