Perceptions, benefits and barriers to Bachelor’s degree-based education for massage therapy: PhD thesis survey findings

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Aim
To investigate the range of perceptions and attitudes toward bachelor’s degree-based education across massage therapy stakeholder groups: massage educators; practicing massage therapists; and massage therapy students.

The University of Otago School of Physiotherapy Ethics Committee approved this research.

Method
- Stakeholder online survey (n=128)
- Dec 2011 > Jan 2012
- Response rate 13.5%
- Quantitative and qualitative data

Demographics
- Participant Subgroups:
  - Massage Educators (ME) 10%
  - Massage Therapists (MT) 49.2%
  - Massage Students (MS) 26.6%
  - Massage Educators / Massage Therapists (ME/MT) 6.3%
  - Massage Therapists / Massage Students (MT/MS) 7%
- Female 86.7%
- Age 22-55 years
- Certificate/Diploma qualified 78.8%; Bachelors degree 9.8%
- Self employed (MT 93.5%)

Results
- Bachelor’s degree minimum qualification to practice relaxation massage: 5.6% agreed, 84.8% disagreed, 9.6% neutral
- Bachelor’s degree essential for industry growth: 54.7% agreed, 25.8% disagreed, 19.5% neutral

Themes identified:
- **Agreement:**
  - Knowledge and skills
  - Growth and viability
  - Positive image as a health practice

- **Neutral:**
  - Partial agreement / partial disagreement
  - Unsure

- **Disagreement:**
  - No benefit
  - Restrictive
  - Extends massage therapy beyond scope of practice

Conclusion
Findings indicated widely opposing views on Bachelor’s degree-based education, especially in regards to therapeutic/clinical massage. Degree-based education was seen as essential for growth by over half of participants. Differences could not be attributed to any one group of stakeholders due to the small sample size. Findings gave insight into the factors that contribute to resistance to, and engagement in, degree-based education, and formed the basis for phase two of the research.