How to build a stronger collective for Massage New Zealand: Views of the Members

Sami Toombs & Jo Smith

Introduction
Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is viewed as a “group of diverse medical health care systems, practices and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine”1. Massage therapy is considered to be among the CAM occupations and is the fastest growing of the CAM movement2. Professions like osteopaths say that the bachelors degree education is the minimum educational requirement for allied health professionals3, likewise with physiotherapy4, creating a discrepancy between them and massage therapy. For massage therapy practice there are no current legislated education requirements needed in New Zealand5 and neither has the New Zealand government regulated the practice of massage therapy6. Massage New Zealand (MNZ), a voluntary professional body for massage therapists are there to provide the public with access to qualified massage therapists, to support professional massage therapists and to promote the benefits of massage therapy7 and regulation. There has already been evidence to see the most common suggestion from the members that they would like to see MNZ doing is regulation and ACC registration8. In New Zealand there are a number of courses where people can gain short course qualifications to practise massage therapy, however, there are only two main institutions that offer bachelor’s degrees and diplomas9. Statistics showed that 1272 people in 2006 called themselves massage therapists10 and in 2008 the numbers of members registered with MNZ was 438. This shows the amount of potential members there could be and leads to the purpose of the research which was to understand how to build a stronger collective for MNZ: views of the members. The aim was to learn about different strategies and understand what members want from MNZ.

Methods
Semi-structured telephone interviews with remedial massage therapists (n=5) throughout New Zealand who were members of MNZ.

Questions related to the role, benefits, and strategies to grow MNZ.

The study was approved by the SIT Human Ethics Committee.

Role of MNZ
Three major themes were noted in this category as stated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting System</td>
<td>MNZ is there for the members as a support system if members are needing help. For example networking and information sharing.</td>
<td>(Poppy) “I think it gives a support system for massage therapists and a way of regulating it”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulating Body</td>
<td>MNZ provides standards and code of ethics to the members.</td>
<td>(Louise) “It’s an incorporated professional body that provides standards and codes of ethics”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Massage</td>
<td>MNZ is there to help promote massage therapy and the members.</td>
<td>(Rex) ”I see the their role as organising and promoting the massage profession”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers to MNZ membership
Participants expressed that there were no barriers personally, but did make suggestions of potential barriers.

- The cost relative to a person’s income - Louise said “there are people in the rural parts and it can be quite costly for them”.
- The amount of professional development hours that had to be done to maintain the membership - Professional development (PD) development are compulsory hours done to further the education of the therapist; a point system is used as the criteria - Poppy said that “probably the hardest part now is getting enough points” while Louise said “the professional development hours is 80 points within two years . . . its more than nursing”.
- The cost of the professional development hours - Poppy stated “the number of decent workshops are not held around where I live so quite often I have to travel and it gets quite expensive to go to”. Rex said “for some, its the cost especially when they are starting out and for others its the further training they must do to get PD points to stay registered”.

Strategies to grow
Participants acknowledged three main strategies to grow MNZ including:

- Increase membership numbers – like chasing ex members, approaching students, making no limit on who can become a member. Rex said “somewhat broadening it out to non members”. Poppy said “it’s important to get the information to the students at student level and get them on board”. Emma stated “the more you feed someone the bigger it grows and if you limit that it’s going to atrophy so if you include more people then I think you have a bigger success rate”.
- Increase the profile - through information sharing and advertising. Charlie expressed “maybe having a liaison person . . . making contact with massage therapists in their area calling them . . . telling other therapists what the organisation offers”. Poppy said “increase the awareness and really having a results focus around massage”. 
- Increase the benefits - in house education and sharing; up skilling and networking; and personal contact. Poppy shared “create more opportunities to bring overseas speakers to NZ and workshops”. Rex stated, “if all massage therapists saw the value of up skilling and networking then they will want to be members.” Emma who said “coming around to each clinic for those who are a member”.

Benefits of MNZ membership
Participants indicated 3 themes relating to benefits as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Education and networking | This includes attending AGM’s, workshops and conferences which MNZ provides. Having compulsory PD hours and have guest speakers. | (Louise) “you have education and have to keep up your hours through the professional development. That you get together and it inspires you so they organise AGMS that has elections and workshops”. (Louise) “the benefits of the insurance and that works really well”. (Poppy) “just feeling like there is some professional support there that give you more professional appearance knowing that I have the code of ethics”.
| Discounts | Including insurance discounts, advertising and receiving magazines. Having support and recognition. Providing a professional appearance and code of ethics. | |
| Professional Body | |

Conclusion
Participants appeared satisfied with their professional body, and were clear of and valued the benefits available to them. The activities of MNZ as a professional body appear to be in alignment with participants wishes. Participants shared some strategies that may be useful to strengthen and grow MNZ, and also some potential barriers that maybe useful when exploring themes with non members. This study is limited by the small sample size of only five participants and it only covered the RMT membership group of MNZ. For future studies, non-members could be involved to investigate how to build a stronger collective and why they are not becoming members of MNZ; this may give relatively different information for MNZ.

References