PATHOLOGY: WHAT DO ‘WE’ REALLY NEED TO KNOW
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Method
Pilot study with 4 participants, using qualitative, face to face interviews transcribed semi-verbatim. Participants sampled were practicing Invercargill massage therapists holding at least a diploma qualification. Ethics approval granted by the Massage Division of the School of Health Exercise and Recreation Ethics Committee.

Pathology knowledge perceived to be essential
- Mental health, Muscle injuries, Neurology and contraindications. John said “having enough knowledge to see if massage is indicated or not, I think for acute injuries, you need to know about that 72 hour period”. Desiree adding, she thought a strong knowledge of neurological conditions were important because “they overlap very much into the musculoskeletal system”.
- A good base knowledge was needed as clientele and conditions seen were extremely varied. Desiree said “why ask the question on the sheet (health history) if you don’t know how to respond to what they are telling you”.
- All agreed the information covered was sufficient and relevant, and no additional information or pathologies were identified. Dan said “they pretty much got it figured out, they do well”. It was suggested some of the lesser known pathologies taught could be “culled”.

Why massage therapists need to know about pathology

Results

Introduction
Currently defined by Fritz (2013) massage therapy is the application of professional, structured, therapeutic touch. Werner (2009) states, massage therapy has been proven efficient over time, for the treatment of chronic diseases that had undesirable responses to medical approaches. The Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill currently offers a Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage degree (BTSM), and a large range of pathologies are taught as part of the curriculum. It is vital for a massage therapist to know and understand why massage therapy is recommended for clients and conditions, also knowledge as to whether massage therapy can be modified so as to not further exacerbate symptoms. The purpose of this research was to understand the perceptions of practicing massage therapists, in regards to essential pathology knowledge.

Limitations
The small localised sample size leads to the results not being generalisable to any population. Further information is needed from a wider participant base before these perceptions could be considered a consensus.

Discussion
Werner (2009) reports massage therapy is indicated in most instances to assist with the alleviation of symptoms in clients with mental conditions. Boundaries and client tolerance levels must be respected. It can be surmised that a sound pathological knowledge of common mental conditions is essential in the practice of massage therapy. Whilst no participant indicated more knowledge was needed in this area, they did agree it was very important for massage therapists to be knowledgeable in this area.

All participants reported seeing chronic pain often in their practice, and they all agreed muscular injuries are extremely common; a pattern evident in the literature (Werner 2009). All participants agreed and they felt they had sufficient knowledge in this area. Neurology and neurological conditions were perceived by participants as being essential foundational knowledge. With the large scope that neurology encompasses, a strong knowledge and understanding of the basic nervous system, conditions, and symptoms relating to this area was perceived to be essential for massage therapists.

When participants were asked “Why do massage therapists need to know about pathology” the common themes were a sound knowledge base of pathologies and contraindications. Participants believed this was due to the varied pathological conditions and symptoms seen in the clinical setting.

Conclusion
It would seem the strongest theme found through the analysis of this study was the need for a strong knowledge base in common pathologies, with an emphasis on contraindications and conditions requiring modifications. All participants believed the current BTSM curriculum was relevant for their practice as massage therapists.

References: