A survey of New Zealand massage therapists: utilisation and practice patterns

Background

Within New Zealand, massage therapy has developed as a specific CAM health service, distinct from physiotherapy, and is one of the fastest growing areas of this sector of the health industry. The practice of massage therapy is unregulated; however, Massage New Zealand (MNZ) is a voluntary professional body that requires evidence of a formal massage therapy qualification for membership, represents 250 qualified massage therapists at either a certified (relaxation) or formal massage therapy qualification for membership, and is one of the fastest growing areas of this sector of the health industry. The practice of massage therapy is unregulated; however, Massage New Zealand (MNZ) is a voluntary professional body that requires evidence of a formal massage therapy qualification for membership.

Methods

Design: National randomised survey questionnaire

Participants

- qualified massage therapists who were members of Massage New Zealand
- with a massage volume of at least 5 massages in a typical week
- with repeat clients (provided at least 5 clients a minimum of 2 sessions in the last 3 months)
- 16 years or older

Questionnaire

- questions, sourced and constructed
- closed ended (categorical, ordinal or numerical responses); ranking

Results

Therapist characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>NZ European</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Age range years</th>
<th>Years of Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>(mean SD)</td>
<td>0.5 - 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practice types (most common)

- Therapeutic massage 83.9%
- Relaxation massage 84.2%
- Sports massage 74.3%

More than 95% of therapists reported typically providing self-care recommendations as part of the massage therapy consultation.

Practice settings varied

- Solo practice 37.6%
- Group practice within multidisciplinary group 31.8%
- With a group of massage therapists 16.2%

Summary

- Commonly used techniques and most frequent issues or conditions seen by massage therapists were similar to that reported in US studies, suggesting some cross-national congruency.

- Other similarities: therapist characteristics, modes of practice, range of practice settings, part-time nature of work, number of weeks of practice in a typical year, duration of visits, common assessment methods, and self-care recommendations given to clients.

- Noticeable differences: lack of massage therapy practice in the NZ hospital and spa setting, duration of training (typically 2400 hours in NZ), MNZ therapists received very little (0.3%) medical insurance reimbursement or other third party payments.

Joanna M. Smith¹ ²  S. John Sullivan ²  G. David Baxter ²

¹New Zealand Massage Therapy Research Centre, Southern Institute of Technology, New Zealand
²Centre for Physiotherapy Research, School of Physiotherapy, University of Otago, New Zealand

Approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee