### Southland Based Private Practice Physiotherapists’ Perceptions of Massage Therapy

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## Introduction

Massage therapy and physiotherapy are closely linked, both in the present and past, yet both therapies have taken different paths. Physiotherapy began as a profession due to the Society of Trained Masseuses (STM) seeking to make massage a safe, clean and honourable profession. Over time physiotherapists adopted a biomechanical approach to health and illness. While physiotherapists use massage therapy as a treatment for a number of conditions, little is known about physiotherapist’s perceptions of massage therapy. This research project explored the perceptions of massage therapy by Southland based physiotherapists in private practice. This research discusses physiotherapists views of the history of physiotherapy, most used treatment types, their knowledge of massage therapy and its background, overlap and boundaries between massage therapy and physiotherapy, funding, and future referral and collaboration between the two professions.

## Methods

- **Face-to-face semi-structured interviews (n=4)**

This study was approved by the SIT Human Ethics Committee.

## Results

### Categories/Themes

#### History of Physiotherapy
- "I think massage therapists and physiotherapists were one in the same a long time ago. Massage therapy is more hands on massage and muscle based, whereas physiotherapy went down the joint line and that’s my understanding of how it has progressed". Estelle
- "The New Zealand School of Physiotherapy started its roots as the School of Massage Therapy". Joanne

#### Preferred, most used treatment types.
- "I spend 10 to 20 to 40 minutes" on massage during a 40 minute treatment session, "depending on what else I am doing and their needs". Joanne
- Conditions and techniques physiotherapists use massage on are relaxation massage, post mobilization, trigger points, muscle spasm, tight fascial compartment, neck pain, back pain, knots, shoulder injuries, effusion/oedema, deep transverse frictions, myofascial release, myofascial trigger points, headaches, cervical spine dysfunction, musculoskeletal, growth related problems and swelling.
- Estelle states that massage therapists should be educated for a "minimum of three years definitely". "Any less than that and you can’t appreciate the complexities of the human body and the human mind as well, I think at least three years gives you enough time to theoretically learn where their muscles are, what they do, how they work".
- "I’m not specifically aware of the exact things they do (Massage New Zealand), but they do represent massage therapists in the professional capacity". Joanne

#### Knowledge of Massage Therapy and background
- Melody thought massage therapists can help keep injuries at bay, stating that "they [massage therapists] support what I do, because I’m getting down to the ‘knitty-gritty’ of what the injury is and I’m always encouraging them [clients] to stay away from me, and they can often do that by just trying to keep their muscle balance [by using massage]."
- Melody and Estelle thought that physiotherapists "work far more with joint problems I should imagine than massage therapists". "We would be doing a lot more mobilising and manipulating". Lynnette said that funding can sometimes be a barrier for accessing massage therapy services, however "it may not be money but it may be the time, but it’s the same as physiotherapy services".
- Melody said that "it’s certainly not a barrier for me recommending it, but it can often be a financial barrier because we are funded by ACC for probably 70-75% of our work, so it makes it cheaper to come and see me than the massage therapist".

#### Funding
- Lynnette thinks that "[massages] can have quite a big role, probably as a result of where I came from, from my training". Lynnette thinks that "[massages] can have quite a big role, and I think more and more people are looking at alternatives to taking medication".
- Melody said collaboration can be beneficial "because it gives that one-stop-shop, also I think it’s very encouraging to both professions in the sense that we validate each other, which I think is a healthy thing".

#### Referral and collaboration
- Joanne said "I see massage as an adjunct to physiotherapy, probably as a result of where I came from, from my training". "Setting up that relationship where the massage therapist will refer to physiotherapy and in turn expect referrals back, just making the expectations known and the services known and the physiotherapist will do the same".

## Discussion

Overall physiotherapists had a generally positive perception of massage therapy and they knew their profession had branched off from massage into a more biomechanical approach. They have not worked in collaboration with a massage therapist directly, however they are open to the idea, and they believe that massage therapists working with therapeutic massage should have a high level of education. Overall physiotherapists see massage as a great adjunct to mainstream medicine, and believe that there should be a good referral system between both modalities. This study is limited by the small number of participants.

### Key Findings:

- Physiotherapists have generally positive perceptions of massage therapy.
- Physiotherapists are aware of their origins.
- Physiotherapists see that there is a partial overlap between both modalities and use massage as part of their practice.
- Physiotherapists are open to collaboration with a massage therapist.
- Physiotherapists have a great working relationship with massage therapists through referral.

### References:


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**Category:**
- History of Physiotherapy
- Preferred, most used treatment types.
- Knowledge of Massage Therapy and background
- Funding
- Referral and collaboration
- Overall Perceptions of Massage Therapy

**Thematic Analysis:**
- The overlap between physiotherapy and massage therapy in terms of treatment types.
- The historical background and origins of both therapies.
- Funding and financial considerations in the collaboration between physiotherapists and massage therapists.
- The referral and collaborative practices in private practice settings.

**Discussion Points:**
- The perspectives of physiotherapists on the role of massage therapy in their practice.
- The acknowledgment of the professional capacity and boundaries between massage therapy and physiotherapy.
- The importance of funding and its implications on the collaboration between physiotherapists and massage therapists.
- The collaborative practices and expectations in private practice settings.

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**Graphical Representation:**
- Diagram showing the overlap and boundaries between massage and physiotherapy.
- Table summarizing the key findings and thematic analysis.

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