Celebrating ten years of massage therapy bachelor’s degree graduates at Southern Institute of Technology

In 2002, the first Bachelor’s degree for massage therapists in the Southern Hemisphere was launched at the Southern Institute of Technology. As part of the year 3 BTSM curriculum students are required to implement and complete a research project. This year it was timely to investigate 10 years of BTSM graduates and how their lives have been impacted by undertaking a degree in massage therapy. A research project was conducted to review the outcomes from a BTSM education from a graduate’s perspective. Issues examined were: the BTSM curriculum and benefits of degree level education, their employment journey, clinical practice patterns, and their satisfaction with their massage career. All year 3 BTSM students enrolled in the research paper were part of the research team under the guidance and supervision of massage therapy research staff. As 2013 marks the 10\textsuperscript{th} cohort of BTSM graduates, all graduating student researchers were also invited to participate in the study.

Data were collected in two phases: a questionnaire and individual interviews. Firstly, all 2004-2012 BTSM graduates for whom contact details could be sourced were sent an information sheet and invited to participate in the study. The first part of the questionnaire was not anonymous. In this section graduates were asked to write their own personal profile (snapshot). The second part of the questionnaire was anonymous and asked graduates about their BTSM experience and benefits of degree level education, their employment journey, clinical practice patterns, and their satisfaction with their massage therapy career. The second phase of the study aimed to tell more detailed stories of life post BTSM for a smaller number of graduates. Researchers conducted face to face or telephone / Skype interviews with 26 graduates and wrote a number of graduate stories from the findings.

The results from this study are presented in the following ways:

1. Snapshots (personal profile of graduates)
3. Graduate Stories
4. Four research posters

Items 1-3 are found in the Southern Institute of Technology Journal of Applied Research (SITJAR) Special Edition: A massage degree and beyond – the journey of BTSM graduates 2004-2013.

Four posters are also presented at the Research Symposium and also report on the questionnaire findings:

A Massage Career & Beyond: Methods & Learning (Part 1)
A Massage Career & Beyond: Practice Patterns (Part 2)
A Massage Career & Beyond: Evaluating the BTSM curriculum (Part 3)
A Massage Career & Beyond: Career Aspects (Part 4)

This project was one of collaboration and all researchers took an active role in all aspects of the research project. Accordingly, all authors are acknowledged for the peer-reviewed article, snapshots, and graduate stories included in the journal. Some pieces of writing, for example, the posters, have lead authors but these lead authors are writing on behalf of the ‘2013 Year 3 BTSM researchers’. The research team consisted of 14 year 3 BTSM student researchers and 2 research trained massage therapy staff. The ‘2013 Year 3 BTSM researchers’ are:

Donna Smith
Emma Brown
Catherine Cunliffe
Liz de Groot
Chelsie Dimmock
Paige Harris
Bernie Hewitson
Anita Flannery
Chloe Jackson
Sarah Lock
Stephanie Marshall
Bailey McCulloch
Angela Roy
Hannah Strickett
BJ Symon
Jo Smith

The four research posters present four aspects of the study and do not have a traditional abstract. Instead a summary of findings from the questionnaire is reported below. The abstract is taken from the peer-reviewed article titled: Evaluating degree-based education for massage therapy: a survey of Southern Institute of Technology Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage.

Abstract

Degree-based education for massage therapy is relatively recent. The Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage (BTSM) was the first massage degree in the Southern Hemisphere and was implemented in 2002 at Southern Institute of Technology (SIT). December 2013 marks the tenth cohort of graduates. The aim of this study was to review the outcomes from a BTSM education from a graduate’s perspective. Issues examined were: the BTSM curriculum and benefits of degree level education, their employment journey, clinical practice patterns, and their satisfaction with their massage career. A self-report questionnaire was posted or emailed to 63 BTSM graduates and anonymous responses were collected from 50 graduates (79.4% return-rate). Key findings were that 90% of graduates worked in the massage industry with the majority indicating they were employed in massage therapy related jobs within three months of graduation. Participants were highly satisfied with their BTSM education and 96% felt that their massage degree education prepared them for working in the industry. Most found their massage career rewarding and they enjoyed helping people and making a difference. When asked, “If you could do it all over, would you still train to be a massage therapist?” 87.5% (45/50) indicated yes, and 90.2% said they would still choose a degree qualification. Consolidation of learning, breadth and depth of knowledge and clinical application, growth as a professional, work readiness, and greater credibility were reported as the key benefits of SIT’s three year massage bachelor’s degree. The survey was a very valuable source of information and will help inform potential and current massage students, educators, researchers, the massage profession, and wider stakeholders about degree-based education for massage therapy and its inherent benefits for the individual and the collective.