A TRAINING MANUAL FOR MASSAGE THERAPISTS WORKING IN SPAS AND RESORTS

by

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A Master’s Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts

OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

August, 1998
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has been approved
June 1998

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Associate Dean for Graduate Studies
ABSTRACT

The massage profession is experiencing a growth in popularity. Massage is being used increasingly as a tool in integrative medicine, in the workplace with corporate chair massage, and in spas and resorts. Massage emerged from a grassroots movement that has not incorporated professional standards of behavior into training curricula.

The purpose of this study was to determine what areas need to be addressed in professional training at massage schools and onsite at spas. Spa managers, who directly supervise massage staff, were asked in a preliminary survey to indicate what they had observed to be lacking in their staffs’ training. Possible areas to be addressed included: the need for refinement in technique; mechanical and ergonomic training designed to minimize injuries; and professional standards of behavior. The results of the survey indicated a concern for the lack of professional standards in the field of massage.

Due to a lack of literature on the subject related to the practice of massage, this researcher examined standards among other professions including the fields of psychotherapy, physical therapy, the hotel industry, and business at large. Culling these sources, this researcher developed an outline of topics which may be frequently addressed in other professional trainings. These topics include: professional conduct, professional relationships, assessing the client and determining needs, scope of treatment, boundaries and limits to disclosure, confidentiality, self-care for therapists, and emergencies.
A nationwide survey of spa managers confirmed these were topics that were important to increase levels of professionalism within the field of massage. The training manual that resulted from this study will contribute to the literature available to massage therapists who wish to refine their standards of professional behavior.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my teacher

Margaret Elke
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CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The art of massage has existed for thousands of years; in fact it is probably the oldest of the healing modalities. Yet it nearly disappeared from public awareness during this century. It has not been included in a medical repertory in the United States for almost one hundred years. For decades it was the domain of the very rich who were often exposed to it in Europe or the Far East, as well as serving as a front for prostitution.

The practice of massage began a renaissance in the 1960s. It was a grassroots effort that came out of the human potential growth movement. Schools sprang up that offered "professional" training. With a lack of State licensure and community licensing requirements often being minimal, massage attracts many people who want to be in the health field without following a strict, demanding course of study (Elke, 1997).

Over the past decade there has been a growth in demand for massage therapists. Health resorts and local spas are increasingly popular, with massage being a cornerstone of their business. In the workplace, massage has been recognized as being a powerful tool to counteract the effects of stress. Corporate chair massage is becoming a popular fringe benefit for workers. Even conventional medicine is moving toward an "integrative" approach that includes "alternative" modalities, including massage (Knaster, 1998).
Development of the Problem

As the profession moves into ever more sophisticated markets, it is essential that codes of conduct be established to guarantee positive experiences for clients, massage therapists and therapist employers. In preparation for writing a training manual, this researcher conducted a preliminary survey of resort and spa directors who hire and supervise massage staff. This survey explored three possible areas of need for therapist training in the workplace. These areas included:

1. technical expertise, questioning if the staff is adequately trained in a variety of techniques. Are their skill levels well developed?
2. problems relating to injuries among the massage staff. Excessive injuries may indicate a need for additional mechanical and ergonomic training for the staff.
3. codes of conduct that might be similar to those in other therapeutic professions, such as counselors and physical therapists. These include professional relationships, confidentiality, business ethics, and limits to treatment.

It was in this third area, codes of conduct, that individuals who supervise massage staff reported the greatest lack of training and professional polish. This suggests that if massage is to successfully integrate into the health programs of individuals as well as into the health system, spas and resorts, there needs to be a definitive set of professional guidelines that are introduced into training programs in schools and at the workplace.
Need for the Study

In reviewing the literature, this researcher found a lack of information relating directly to ethical and professional guidelines for massage therapists. While many massage therapists appear to be unaware of the need for such guidelines, those who supervise them, such as spa managers and directors, have expressed a need for them. It is for this reason that they have been asked to take part in this research.

Spas and resorts represent a good target for a training manual because they are the first point of contact for many an individual’s massage experience. It is not uncommon for spas to hire therapists directly out of school. At the same time, spas and resorts are often the place where people have their first massages (Elke, 1997). Understanding problems unique to the spa setting, and addressing these problems in a training manual, could contribute a tool for increasing levels of professionalism. To determine the most important topics to be addressed in a training manual for massage therapists working in spas and resorts the study will survey individuals who hire and supervise massage staff in a spa setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry.

In this study, resort is defined as a destination hotel with spa facilities connected. These facilities may include bathing tubs, either communal or individual, saunas, steam rooms, and massage rooms. Complete beauty salon facilities are also common. Resorts may offer special healthy menus in their restaurants as well as work out classes. Packages or programs are available for creating a “fitness” vacation. Typically, resorts appeal to out-of-town guests,
although membership in a club may be offered to locals or services may be used by the public at large.

A spa is that facility which is connected to a resort or it may be a "day" facility which attracts mainly local clientele. It may offer any combination of the above amenities.

Research Question

What is the content of a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry?
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Relative to the purpose of this study, the following topics in the literature were reviewed and are described in this chapter: professional conduct, professional relationships, assessing client needs, scope of treatment, limits to disclosure, confidentiality, self-care for therapists, and emergencies.

Professional Conduct

Issues regarding professional conduct may seem commonsensical, such as enjoinders to be punctual, yet it is considered best to present such guidelines in writing to the new employee in order to clarify expectations. Reminders to “be punctual...have a good attendance record...carry your share of the load...be trustworthy” form the foundation of professional conduct (Parker Publishing Company Editorial Staff, 1976, pp. 12-13).

In an interview with day-spa owner Anna Prassa, suggestions were made which would apply more specifically to massage therapists. These include wearing a uniform or following specifications for appearance and answering one’s pager immediately. Issues of business ethics were also addressed, such as not soliciting clients for oneself (Prassa, 1997).

Professional Relationships

“Good business manners often dictate the opposite of good social manners” (Martin, 1982, p. 12) states Miss Manners. She finds often “well-meant friendliness (is) designed to make strangers feel that they are among friends, but the effect is to make them feel worse” (Martin, 1989, p. 333). Miss Manners
suggests a level of formality, uncommon to many in today’s society, actually contributes to a more comfortable workplace.

In Business Etiquette in Brief, Ann Marie Sabath defines business etiquette as “knowing what to do and when” (1993, p. 7). She says that understanding business will “reinforce your confidence...(and) help you past those numerous *moments of hesitation* you may experience when interacting with others” (1993, p. 7).

In a survey of students enrolled in business communication classes, it was found three areas of discomfort were interviewing, interpersonal relationships, and social issues (Maushund et al., 1995, p. 34). It may be assumed these concerns would apply to other professionals as well. These authors determined “two principles govern almost all manners in the workplace: that professional manners are different from social manners and that precedence in business depends on rank, not personal characteristics” (Maushund et al., 1995, p. 41).

In business etiquette, the client is always treated as the individual with the higher rank. Sabath (1993) suggests “honoring in on your guest’s five senses” will help to create an atmosphere of comfort. Sabath recommends

1. *Seeing.* Establish eye contact with your visitor.
2. *Touching.* Greet the person with a confident handshake and end your meeting in the same way.
3. *Hearing.* Use the visitor’s name during your greetings and a few times during your meeting.
4. *Tasting.* Offer the person a beverage. Ask twice. Most people refuse the first time out of politeness.
5. *Smelling.* Don’t overwhelm your visitor with your favorite perfume/cologne (p. 32).

Many businesses lack a policy regarding use of first names. In fact, according to Sabath “one of the most common business faux pas is assuming that everyone wants to be on a first name basis. Simply put, business etiquette dictates
that individuals should always be addressed by their last name unless otherwise requested” (1991, p. 100). This is a sentiment echoed by “Miss Manners” (Martin, 1989) who says, “Investigations in the psychiatric literature indicate that first names are used to address children and to establish informality, familiarity and closeness, while last names are used to address older people and superiors and to convey formality, respect, and distance” (p. 335).

Interactions with peers may also benefit from a certain formality, one which is not fostered in massage training. *The Business Etiquette Handbook* offers suggestions for welcoming new employees into the establishment. These include “show the newcomer around...introduce a newcomer to people...give him clear and complete job instructions.” It is recommended that new employees “don’t try to get too friendly too soon” (Parker Publishing Company Editorial Staff, 1973, pp. 4-5).

In this researcher’s preliminary survey, “lack of support by staff” was listed as the second most common problem reported by massage staff to their supervisors. This suggests that massage therapists would benefit from understanding social issues of non-professional support staff, such as receptionists, laundry help and maintenance workers.

In a case study, management consultant Brenda Paik Sunoo (1996) observed some senior managers “would routinely fail to speak to them (support staff) when passing in the hall or upon arriving in the morning. Yet these same managers would often stick their heads in the offices of professionals with whom they were friendly to say “good morning” and chat briefly.” The result was a “schism between support staff and professionals that negatively impacted the support staff’s job satisfaction and performance.” Sunoo recommends that professionals remember that “support staff tended to identify themselves as people
first and not to be so closely identified with their jobs.” This was in contrast to professionals who “often strongly identified with their jobs” and who “saw no need to speak to support staff unless they had a business reason to do so.” Observing basic etiquette and good manners will help to avoid feelings of resentment among employees who work at different levels (p. 174).

Sometimes it helps for employees to understand that just as there are ‘external guests’ there are ‘internal guests’ (Ritz-Carlton, 1998). These are fellow employees who merit the same respectful treatment that is shown to clientele.

Just as in other fields, the work of massage therapists in spas benefits from each person perceiving herself as a team member. In Building Productive Teams, Varney (1989) says that working with a team orientation yields “such benefits as increased performance, improved quality, higher levels of job satisfaction, and the release and utilization of the powerful creative forces within each organization” (p.1).

Many massage therapists are unaccustomed to working in a structured business setting. In the Business Etiquette Handbook, it is suggested that employees show “deference to superiors...be loyal...(and) respect the supervisor’s time.” The recommendation to “go through channels” is valuable for massage therapists who lack an understanding of the chain of command in corporations. Guidelines for “how to behave when you are criticized” are also useful (Parker Publishing Company Editorial Staff, 1976, pp.33-37).

Advice is also useful regarding ending the business relationship. Suggestions to not “let your emotions overrule your good sense” and “never burn bridges behind you” are beneficial to massage therapists and their former employers (Sabath, 1993, p. 39).
Assessing Clients/Determining Needs

In discussing the assessment of massage clients and the determination of their needs, massage therapists are in a gray zone of being involved in a quasi-medical field while working with clients who expect professional levels of training and expertise. Diagnosis is not a privilege of the massage profession, yet therapists need to determine a focus of treatment and establish contraindications for each client. This problem is exacerbated in the spa setting where intake forms and health evaluation forms are uncommon. Time for interviews is limited to a matter of minutes.

Unfortunately, there exists a dearth of information on this subject, especially in the area of spa massage. Experience suggests that a firm understanding of contraindications is essential. In the Swedish Massage Training Manual, listed contraindications include “fever, acute infectious diseases, varicose veins and phlebitis, edema, high blood pressure, inflammation, cancer, intoxication, and skin problems” (Swedish Staff et al., 1997, p. 17). Information may be ascertained by asking the client to describe any serious health problems.

Visual intake begins with the walk from the waiting area to the massage room. Therapists should look for “splits and asymmetries... taut or bloated belly...overexpanded and collapsed chests...raised shoulders...shoulders pulled back...shoulders pulled forward” (Lidell et al., 1984, pp. 165-173).

Assessment is distinct from judgement, which is to be avoided. While there exists no established Code of Ethics for the massage profession, the one provided by the American Physical Therapy Association suggests relevant guidelines. The first principle is to “respect the rights and dignity of all individuals” (1995, p. 757).
**Scope of Treatment**

As in the previous section, little information exists for establishing a well-defined scope of treatment. In fact, many massage schools refer to treatments as “therapies” and students are taught to “fix” or “heal” physical or psychiatric conditions. Benjamin (p.23) warns against “instances of grave harm resulting from a lack of knowledge and inappropriate action or inaction on the part of practitioners....Massage therapists need to be alert to the disease of thinking ‘we know that which we do not know’ that occurs in alternative-complementary health care as well as in traditional medicine” (p. 23).

The privilege of diagnosis rests solely with licensed primary care physicians. Massage therapists are wise to remember the limits to their abilities in this area and to refer clients to appropriate health care professionals. As massage therapists work more closely with other health care providers, “they must be taught to understand what their strengths and limitations are, and the strengths of their neighboring practitioners as well” (Rothfeld, 1998, p. 26).

**Boundaries/Limits to Disclosure**

Bodyworker and teacher Spiegel (1995, p. 31) suggests “the metaphor in which the therapist becomes invisible during the session”. This suggests the importance of massage therapists understanding their own needs as they enter a session. Looking to the field of psychotherapy to provide guidelines, Corey et al. (1993, p. 31) state “therapeutic progress can be blocked, however, when therapists use their clients, perhaps unconsciously, to fulfil their own needs.”

Corey et al. (1993) site a survey of dual relationships in which “psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers rated the following practices as being ‘never ethical’:
1. accepting a client’s invitation to a special occasion (6.3%)
2. becoming friends with a client after termination (14.8%)
3. inviting clients to an office or clinic open house (26.6%)
4. going out to eat with a client after a session (43.2%)
5. inviting a client to a personal party or social event (63.5%). (p. 146)

These types of guidelines would be useful in the massage profession, as well. Borrowing from other professions for the creation of boundaries in the realm of sexual contact, the American Counseling Association (1995) states “counselors do not have any type of sexual intimacies with clients and do not counsel persons with whom they have had a sexual relationship” (p. 3). Corey et al. (1993) suggest seeking counsel with “an experienced colleague who might be able to help you decide on a course of action” when issues of sexuality cause concern for the therapist. (p. 149)

Results of a study on the benefits of self-disclosure on the part of psychotherapists indicate benefits when it “(a) occurred when these clients were discussing important personal issues, (b) were perceived as being intended by therapists to normalize or reassure the clients, and (c) consisted of a disclosure of personal nonimmediate information about the therapists” (Knox et al., 1997, p. 274).

Confidentiality

The topic of client confidentiality is more firmly established in the counseling and physical therapy professions. Borrowing from the physical therapists’ Code of Ethics is the straightforward admonition that

information relating to the physical therapist-patient relationship is confidential and may not be communicated to a third party not involved in that patient’s care without the prior written consent of the patient, subject to applicable law. (American Physical Therapy Association, 1995 p. 757)
The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association asks that “Counselors respect their clients’ right to privacy and avoid illegal and unwarranted disclosures of confidential information” (American Counseling Association, 1995, p. 5).

Massage therapist and teacher Dean suggests “that all therapists find someone trustworthy to talk to” for “letting off steam” (Dean, 1988, p. 3). Because “our work is so personal...clients may reveal more to us of an intimate and personal nature than is revealed to other helping professionals” (Dean, 1988, p.4).

**Self-Care for Therapists**

Spiegel (1995) suggests that massage therapists attempt “Living graciously and securely in your own body; breathing fully and steadily; containing and sustaining a consistent stream of loving thoughts and feelings; and feeling connected to and supported by the earth” (p. 32).

Dean (1988) points out the dangers of those with low self-esteem, neediness, or burn out as using clients to satisfy their own needs rather than being available to serve their needs. She places responsibility for caring for these issues with therapists themselves and even suggests “it can be a responsible act to leave the practice of massage for a while if you find yourself using your clients rather than serving them” (p. 3).

Montague (1994) identifies “that burnout has two faces: a personal one that involves exhaustion and a feeling of never being able to catch up; and an organizational one that is typified by a lack of desire to go on to new tasks” (p. 178). His advice, while directed at physicians, applies to any health-care provider: “control of their diet and exercise, limit alcohol, and sometimes take 20-minute
afternoon naps” (p. 178). He also identifies “stable family support systems” as helpful in reducing burnout.

Boredom is also identified as a marker for burnout for nurses (Andrica, 1996). This author recommends that health-care professionals “eat, sleep, and exercise regularly. Don’t forget to maintain your sense of humor and laugh and smile” (p. 313).

**Emergencies**

Massage therapists need to be informed for dealing with three types of emergencies: individual medical emergencies, evacuation for hazardous situations, and on-site emergencies. In the first case, basic first aid skills are required and an understanding of when to call for help. These would apply to drownings, heart attacks, and choking, as well as to injuries (American Red Cross, 1993).

In the case of evacuation due to imminent danger, individuals are given a limited amount of time to evacuate the premises. In this case and in the case of on-site emergencies that require immediate exit, massage therapists are in a position to guide guests to safety. “Having an escape plan and understanding the scope of responsibility for others can contribute to the safety of everyone in a facility,” says Fire Captain and Technical Rescue Team Captain Michael Powers (1998).

Protocols and escape plans are outlined in literature published by the Mesa Fire Department. Evacuations may allow time for guests to retrieve their belongings (City of Mesa, 1998) while escapes require immediate action and greater responsibility on the part of employees (City of Mesa, 1998).

**Summary**

Much literature exists in other disciplines to facilitate the creation of a comprehensive outline of professional and responsible behavior for massage
therapists. Each piece plays an integral part in contributing to professional wholeness as massage therapy moves increasingly into the mainstream of American healthcare and recreation.

Areas that are important to focus upon are found in the literature for other professions. Basic business conduct and etiquette are covered as an opening for a training manual. The dynamics of professional relationships with guests, peers, and management increase the understanding of massage therapists of the workings of a structured work environment.

Because of time limitations, there is a definite style and skill to be developed in assessing clients and determining their needs in a spa setting. Scope of treatment is also limited for massage therapists in general, and especially for those working in spas.

Guidelines for confidentiality are often not emphasized in massage therapists' training. All therapists need to understand their responsibilities in this area. Preventing burnout and learning self-care skills is an important issue for all health-care professionals.

Finally, in the case of emergencies, the safety and well-being of spa clients can be largely determined by the level of training and responsibility of staff. Recommendations are made to increase the abilities of massage therapists in this area.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry. The research question is: what is the content of a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry?

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design which consisted of two distinct surveys. The first survey was conducted with massage staff supervisors at local spas and asked them to rank qualities valued in massage staff, major problems reported by massage staff, and concerns they have about massage staff performance. This survey gave direction to questions to be asked in a nationwide survey, also conducted with massage staff supervisors at spas.

This second survey asked spa managers to rate topics on a scale to determine the level of importance each topic might hold for them if it were to be included in a training program or manual for their massage staff.

Population and Sample

The sample questioned in the first survey were massage staff supervisors at spas and resorts in the Phoenix metropolitan area. They were chosen through the Yellow Pages of the phone book. This researcher has some familiarity with the local market and had some knowledge of locations, size, and targeted clientele of most of these spas. This researcher attempted to pick a variety of each of those
variables. Although the sample was small (ten supervisors were interviewed), it represented a range of local spas in terms of location, size (number of treatment rooms and size of massage staff), clientele, price range, and marketing audience.

The second survey was also directed at massage staff supervisors at spas and resorts. The respondents were chosen through a magazine called *Spa Finders* (1997). Spa Finders is an agency that advertises spas across the country and around the world through their magazine. The agency offers a service of booking spa vacations for individuals who have chosen their desired location based on brief descriptions and photographs in the magazine.

Descriptions include a list of services offered and the state in which the spa is located. They are rated according to price using a scale of one to four dollar signs ($-$-$-$). All spas and resorts surveyed offer massage services on site. They are located in all regions of the country with the exception of Alaska, which was not represented in the magazine. In all, 46 spas in 15 states were contacted for the survey. An effort was made to include a range of price as well as location. The final sample size was 21 which represents 46 per cent of those surveyed.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

It is assumed that all participants responded honestly to the surveys. It is also assumed that they were knowledgeable about the information that was asked of them.

**Procedure**

The first survey was administered by phone and by personal interview. Individuals were also encouraged to contribute their own observations and opinions.

The second survey was administered through the mail. This researcher obtained the names of the spas from the *Spa Finders Magazine*. Addresses and
phone numbers were obtained from a CD-ROM at the public library. Each spa was called to find the name of the massage staff supervisor so that correspondence was personalized.

**Instrumentation**

The first survey (Appendix A) included 23 questions. The first section of the survey related to the workings of the spas themselves. This included the size of the facilities in terms of number of treatment rooms; size of staff, both part and full-time; and whether they are contracted or employed. Information was requested regarding new-hire training and orientation. Types of treatments and massages offered by the establishment were also determined.

The second section of the first survey related to the work experience of the massage therapists as viewed by the staff supervisors and as reported by the massage staff to the supervisors. Individuals were asked to rank order qualities most valued in the massage staff and how they are aware their staff has these qualities. They were asked to report the major problems reported to them by the massage staff. Staff supervisors were also asked “What areas of massage staff performance would you like to see improved?” and “Do you feel these issues are adequately addressed in massage therapists’ training?”

The second survey (Appendix B) included 13 questions. The first three questions pertained to the size of the facility and the size of the staff. The remaining questions presented a scale for rating the level of importance of topics for a training manual. These topics included: issues of professional conduct, business ethics, professional relationships, assessing client needs, scope of treatment, professional boundaries, confidentiality, self care, and emergency procedures. The rating scale was numbered from one to four with four indicating “very important”, three for “important,” two being “somewhat important,” and one
as not “important.” Also included in the survey was an invitation to add any comments or to make any suggestions in case this researcher had overlooked any important topics.
CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study consisted of two surveys. The first was a survey of spas and massage businesses in the Phoenix area. This part of the study highlighted areas of interest and perceived needs which might be included in a training a manual for massage therapists.

The second part of the study was a survey of spas nationwide. The purpose of this phase was to clarify still further observations and concerns of spas managers who hire and supervise massage therapists.

Demographics: First Study

The demographic data indicated a wide range of facilities in this survey of ten spas and services. Two participants had no treatment rooms at all but provided services on an outcall basis to resorts. The largest facility had 20 treatment rooms. The mean number of rooms was 8. The number of part-time massage therapists ranged from a low of four to a high of forty with a mean of 13. Four spas had no full-time therapists, while one facility had 18. The mean number of full-time therapists was 6.3. Of these, 20 per cent were independent contractors while 80 per cent were employees. Seventy per cent were connected to a resort and 30 per cent were not. Half of the participants had conducted customer satisfaction surveys and half had not. All of the facilities conducted in-service trainings for staff. Seventy per cent brought in outside teachers for these trainings; 30 per cent did
not. Time spent in new hire orientation averaged 8.95 hours for human resources and 11.1 hours for spa training.

**Findings: First Study**

When asked to rate the three most important qualities in a staff massage therapist, ability to relate well to guests was the highest ranking, variety of technique, followed by strong technique. Managers were aware of these qualities through the hiring process, followed by observation and guest feedback. Major problems reported by massage staff to their managers were ranked as not enough hours, lack of support by staff, and problems with guest appointment schedules.

Concern about staff’s performance provided a clear picture for the direction the training manual should take. These concerns included: development of people skills, talking during massage, not enough pressure in massage, development of communication skills, and appearance. When asked if these issues were adequately addressed in massage therapists’ training, 70 per cent responded negatively. All participants said these issues were addressed during spa orientation. Nine out of ten said they would like to see a training manual and/or course that addresses some of these issues.

**Demographics: Second Study**

Surveys were sent to 46 spas in 15 states. Responses were received from 21 spa managers in 10 states. This represented a 46 per cent return rate. There is a rating scale defining level of expense for the spas listed in the *Spa Finder Magazine*. This scale ranges from $ for the most moderately priced spas to $$$$$ for the most expensive spas. Most of the spas in the magazine are in the $$$ range. This proportion is reflected in the range of returned surveys. There were four spas in the $$$$$ range, 14 in the $$$ range, two represented the $$ level and one at $.
Most of the spas had a mixture of full and part-time therapists on staff. Three spas had contracted and employees as therapists; the remaining eighteen hired their therapists as employees. The number of massage rooms ranged from 30 to 2 with an average of 10 rooms.

Findings: Second Survey

The findings supported the topics that were suggested to be included in the training manual as being very important or important. Ninety per cent of the respondents answered that “general issues of professional conduct” are very important. Eighty per cent listed “professional relationships with guests” and “assessing client needs” as very important. Table I shows the results of the survey.

Participants were invited to make additions or comments about topics they felt should be included in a manual for massage therapists. These comments, each mentioned by one respondent, included: an injunction that therapists not smoke between treatments; the importance of avoiding burnout; that therapists should engage in continuing education; emphasis on attitude; and one respondent who thought therapists should be treated with more respect than they now enjoy from spa directors. One subject stated “all of the categories would be important and necessary for training and maintaining high standards.”
### TABLE I

**RESPONSES TO SURVEY # 2**

**TOPIC TO BE RATED:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General issues of professional conduct such as respecting schedules, appearance, business ethics.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Working in a structured business environment.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Professional relationships with guests.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Professional relationships with management.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Assessing client needs.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Understanding legal and ethical limits to scope of treatment.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Guidelines for professional boundaries.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Understanding confidentiality implicit in the client/therapist relationship.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Self-care for massage therapists.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Understanding emergency protocols.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Percentage Distribution | 65% | 27.5% | 6.5% | .5% |

92.5% of responses are in the **VERY IMPORTANT** and **IMPORTANT** categories.
Summary

The purpose of the study was to develop a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry. The research question was: what is the content of a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa and resort industry?

A preliminary survey of local spa managers indicated concern for a lack of professional standards of behavior in the field of massage. Due to a dearth of literature on the subject related to the practice of massage, this researcher examined standards among other professions including the fields of psychotherapy, physical therapy, the hotel industry, and business at large.

Culling these sources, this researcher developed an outline of subjects which are frequently addressed in other professions and for which no apparent standards have been developed in the massage profession. These topics include: professional conduct, professional relationships, assessing the client and determining needs, scope of treatment, boundaries and limits to disclosure, confidentiality, self-care for therapists, and emergencies.

A nationwide survey was then conducted, contacting spa managers in 15 states. These managers were questioned regarding the level of importance for each of these topics to be included in a training manual for massage therapists working in the spa setting.
The research design for each of these surveys was a questionnaire. The first survey was descriptive. The first section of it was quantitative, identifying the size of staff and facilities. The second section was qualitative, asking spa managers to rank qualities valued in massage staff, major problems reported by massage staff, and concerns they have about staff performance.

The second survey was also descriptive, quantitative and qualitative. The first three questions pertained to size and employment status of the staff as well as to the size of the facility. The remaining questions asked spa managers to rate on a scale to determine the level of importance each topic might hold for them if it were included in a training manual for their massage staff.

The first survey determined the direction and scope of the manual. Questions asked in this survey presented three possibilities for focus of the manual: the refinement of technical skills, work on mechanics and ergonomics to prevent injuries, and the development of professional standards of conduct. The results indicated a desire on the part of spa managers for a training manual that would guide massage staff in the development of professional conduct.

The second survey confirmed the choices this researcher made as topics to be discussed in such a manual. Sixty-five per cent of the responses listed the topics as ‘very important.’ Twenty-eight per cent were reported as being ‘important.’ Seven per cent were listed as being ‘somewhat important’ with less than one per cent of the responses being ‘not important.’ Participants were invited to include comments or additions. No topics were added, although comments were made, such as: limiting smoking between treatments, the importance of avoiding burnout, that therapists should engage in continuing education, and an emphasis on attitude.
Conclusions

The research question addressed in this study was what is the content of a training manual for massage therapists based on input from those in the spa and resort industries? The findings of the preliminary survey indicate a concern that there is a lack of professional standards of behavior in the field of massage.

This researcher examined codes of conduct in other professions to arrive at a list of topics to be included in a training manual. The second survey confirmed these choices as being important. They include: professional conduct, professional relationships, assessing clients and determining their needs, scope of treatment, boundaries and limits to disclosure, confidentiality, self-care for therapists, and emergencies. These topics have become section headings in the training manual in Appendix C.

With data from these two surveys, this researcher has written a training manual for massage therapists working in spas. The last question in the first survey asks: “Would you like to see a training manual and/or course that addresses some of these issues?” Ninety per cent of the participants responded positively.

Recommendations

This researcher plans to add this training manual to materials that are already available to new and practicing massage therapists. The intended effect is to upgrade standards of behavior for individual massage therapists and the profession at large.

This manual will be an effective training tool if used as an orientation guide for new hires, for employees with less than four years experience, and for therapists against whom clients have lodged complaints. The manual will be more
effective when used as a text in a training program currently being designed by this researcher. When used as a training tool for staff in new spas, it may contribute to a standardized approach that will help create a professional atmosphere and reputation.

Research began several years ago at the Touch Research Institute of the University of Miami (Knaster, p. 84) into the effects of massage on the body and the emotions. Tests are done to measure chemical changes and perceived emotional changes in patients who receive massage. This is a new development in a field that has long been outside the medicine’s research model.

A future area of interest for research would be into effective methods for building rapid rapport with clients. More research should also be done into the challenge of developing intimacy with clients while keeping healthy boundaries. This researcher will develop tools to test the efficacy of the training manual when used in a training seminar.
REFERENCES


Mesa, City of (1998). In the event if an emergency or hazardous situation. Brochure. Mesa, Arizona.


APPENDIX A

SPA SURVEY #1
1. How many treatment rooms are in your facility? _____

2. How many massage therapists do you have:
   _____ part-time     _____ full-time

3. Of these therapists, how many are:
   _____ contracted     _____ employees

4. Is your business seasonal? _____ yes     _____ no

5. If yes, circle which season is:
   HIGH  spring  summer  fall  winter
   LOW   spring  summer  fall  winter

6. Is your spa connected to a resort or hotel?     _____ yes     _____ no

7. What percentage of your business is:
   _____ local     _____ out-of-town guests

8. Do you advertise:
   _____ locally     _____ nationally

9. Have you ever conducted a customer satisfaction survey?
   _____ yes     _____ no

10. Do you have a background working in:
    _____ massage     _____ management     _____ both

11. Do you personally conduct in-service training for massage staff?
    _____ yes     _____ no

12. Do you bring in outside teachers for in-service trainings?
    _____ yes     _____ no

13. How many hours are spent in new-hire orientation:
    _____ for human resources
    _____ for the spa
14. What is the minimum number of hours of training you require for your therapists? _____ hours

15. Do you offer spa treatments (i.e. scrubs and herbal wraps)?
   _____ yes  _____ no

   If "yes," what percentage of your business is:
   _____ treatments
   _____ massages

16. Of massage therapies, which of the following (in terms of percentage of requests) are the most popular:
   _____ Swedish
   _____ sports
   _____ Oriental (Shiatsu, accupressure)
   _____ energetic (Reiki, jin shin, cranio-sacral)
   _____ deep tissue
   _____ other  _____________________________

17. What are the qualities you value most in your massage staff? (In order of importance).
   _____ strong technique
   _____ experience (5 years or more)
   _____ variety of techniques
   _____ ability to relate well to guests
   _____ ability to relate well to peers
   _____ other  _____________________________

18. How are you aware of these qualities in individual staff members?
   _____ hiring process
   _____ observation
   _____ guest feedback

19. What are the major problems reported by massage staff? (In order of importance).
   _____ injury/muscle fatigue
   _____ too many hours of work
   _____ not enough hours of work
   _____ lack of support by other staff (front desk, laundry, etc.)
   _____ problems with schedules of guest appointments
   _____ work scheduling problems
   _____ pay/tips
   _____ other  _____________________________
20. What are the concerns you have about your massage staffs' performance?
   _____ not enough pressure in massage
   _____ too much pressure
   _____ aggressive approach
   _____ talking during massage
   _____ inappropriate disclosure during massage
   _____ underdeveloped people skills
   _____ promoting own business with guests
   _____ inappropriate medical diagnosis/advise
   _____ sexual misconduct
   _____ other __________________________________________

21. Do you feel these issues are adequately addressed in massage therapists' training?
    _____ yes      _____ no

22. Are these issues addressed during spa orientation?
    _____ yes      _____ no

23. Would you like to see a training manual and/or course that addresses some of these issues?
    _____ yes      _____ no

If you have additional comments or any suggestions for a training manual, please include them below.
APPENDIX B

SPA SURVEY # 2
**Background Information**

How many massage therapists are on your staff: __Full-time  ___Part-time

How many of your therapists are: ______Contracted  ______Employed

How many massage rooms does your facility have? ______

---

**Using the scale following each item, rate the importance of the possible topics listed below that could be part of a training program or manual for massage therapists at your spa:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>General issues of professional conduct such as respecting schedules, appearance, business ethics.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Working in a structured business environment.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Professional relationships with guests.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Professional relationships with management.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Assessing client needs.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Understanding legal and ethical limits to scope of treatment.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Guidelines for professional boundaries.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Understanding confidentiality implicit in the client/therapist relationship.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Self-care for massage therapists.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Understanding emergency protocols.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any additions or comments are welcome on the back.
APPENDIX C

TRAINING MANUAL FOR MASSAGE THERAPISTS WORKING IN SPAS
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SECTION I

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Professional conduct is common sense advice that applies to all professions. A review for anyone starting a new job guarantees that everyone agrees to the same standards of behavior. Some of these suggestions may seem exceedingly obvious, but we can all think of others who have not used them.

- **BE ON TIME**... in fact, arrive a few minutes early for your shift. Leave ample time to set up your work space and review your schedule for the day. If possible, check your schedule with the main appointment book to be sure there have been no mistakes in transcribing your appointments. *Remember, you are responsible for each appointment!*

- **ANSWER YOUR PAGER...IMMEDIATELY.** Sometimes it is convenient to be on-call. Let the scheduler know how much time you need to arrive for your appointments. Be prepared to leave for work right away.

- **HAVE A GOOD ATTENDANCE RECORD.** Learn who to contact if you are out sick. Do you need to arrange a replacement? If so, be sure to have phone numbers of other massage therapists on staff who could cover your shift.

- **CARRY YOUR SHARE OF THE LOAD.** Leave your room clean, with oil bottles filled. Stock up on linens for the next person who uses the room. Report broken equipment to the appropriate person.
• **AVOID GOSSIP.** Rumors travel quickly. This is one loop that is best to avoid. Usually people who don’t contribute to gossip don’t get gossiped about!

• **CHECK YOUR APPEARANCE.** Most spas have uniforms. Be sure to have yours clean and pressed. Find out what policy is regarding jewelry and hair styles and comply. If you do not have uniforms, follow guidelines set by the establishment.

• **CHECK WITH THE FRONT DESK FREQUENTLY.** Schedules can be fluid at spas. An open space in your schedule may be filled after you have begun working. One guest may cancel an appointment and another put in her place. Even if schedulers are supposed to notify you of changes, often times they do not. You are responsible for knowing your schedule.

• **DO NOT HAND OUT YOUR OWN BUSINESS CARDS TO GUESTS.** Do encourage guests to request you when they return by using cards from the spa with your name on them.

• **LEAVE YOUR CIGARETTES AT HOME.** Non-smokers can be sensitive to the smell of smoke on breath, hands, and clothing. This odor is not consistent with the healthy image of spas. Do yourself and others a favor and do not smoke during your shift.
SECTION II

PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Developing skill in relationships contributes to a sense of harmony and well-being in any work place. Because many massage therapists do not have experience working in a structured work environment, it is helpful to learn ways of relating with internal customers.

External customers, guests, expect the same level of professionalism from massage therapists that they expect in other areas at the resort, such as restaurants, front desk, and the concierge. Because of the intimate nature of massage, it is especially important that guests are made to feel safe, comfortable and at-ease immediately.

RELATING TO GUESTS

Greetings

There is truth in the old adage, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Finding your next guest in the waiting room (or wherever she is hiding) in a timely manner contributes to her (and your) relaxation.

• Your session really begins with your firm handshake. Look into your guests eyes as you shake her hand, say her name, and then introduce yourself.

• A good deal of confusion exists regarding the use of first or last names. This is especially true in facilities with relaxed casualness and intimacy, such as spas. A
good rule of thumb is to address a guest as Ms.______ if she is several years your senior. It never contributes to relaxation when we offend someone!

- In a new setting, it is comforting to the guest when she is told what you and she are going to do next. Tell her that you will take her to the massage room. This is a good time to establish contact by touching her arm or shoulder as you lead her to the room.

- If you have the impression that your guest arrived just in time for the appointment, ask if she is ready for the massage or if she would like to use the bathroom before getting started.

- Quiet conversation while walking to the massage room begins to develop rapport. This should be undemanding and safe, such as a question about where she is from or a comment about the weather.

- When you are in the massage room, inquire if your guest has had massage before. If so, a brief description of your style of massage will suffice. If she has never had massage before, add to this description suggestions about how to receive a massage. This includes an invitation to inform you of any discomfort she may experience, such as being cold, pressure being too deep, or having to go to the bathroom. Create an environment that is safe and comfortable for her.

- Explain that you will leave the room while your guest disrobes. Show her where to hang her robe and tell her how to position herself on the table.

- When you return, ask her to take a deep breath (and take one yourself). Let her know the best massages are those received with a minimum of talking. Enjoy!!

**Closing the session**

- When you have finished the massage, try to allow a moment for your guest to just lie on the table. You may use this time to straighten the room quietly.
• Explain then that you will leave the room while she gets herself up. You may want to lie her robe across the table and position her slippers alongside the table.

• If you have any concerns about your guest getting herself up safely, or if you need to move her quickly but gracefully out of the room, suggest that you will help her off the table. Instruct her to roll onto her side and push herself into a sitting position. Stand behind her and help to put on her robe. You may position her slippers on the floor for her to slide into or even slip them onto her feet before she gets off the table.

• Escort your guest to the waiting room. If she has another service, look at her schedule and tell her how much time she has before the next appointment. If you know who will be coming for her, mention that person’s name, for example, “Mary will come here at 10 o’clock to get you for your facial.”

   Always invite your guest to return to the spa!

**RELATING TO CO-WORKERS**

Everyone working at a spa knows to be their best for External Guests. When you think of co-workers as Internal Guests, you are motivated to be your best with them, too.

Thinking of being on a team is a good way to understand that each co-worker’s contribution is valuable. On a team the emphasis is on cooperation rather than competition. The focus is on creating a finely tuned instrument where events are well coordinated instead of turning the spotlight on a few stars. Here are some ways to work together.
Peers

New Therapists

The 'buddy system' is popular in many spas. A new therapist is assigned a 'buddy' to show her around. This buddy also:

* introduces her to new people
* helps with training
* answers any questions
* gives clear and complete job descriptions

As a newcomer

* Be open to new ways of doing things
* Allow time for relationships with peers to develop
* Find out who to ask for help with specific problems

Support Staff

- Support staff includes people at the front desk, laundry and maintenance people...in short, anyone who will help you to do your job well. Since you could not do your job without them, it is important to be respectful in your dealings with them.
- Be generous with your greetings...with EVERYONE!
- Express appreciation for a job well done, especially under stressful circumstances.
- If you have a problem or complaint, be thoughtful and gentle in dealing with it.
Supervisors

- Respect your supervisor’s time.
  
  *If you have a problem or suggestion, think out what you have to say ahead of time...perhaps even bring in a list of points to discuss.

- Inquire about the chain of command and follow it when communicating problems.

- Find out supervisors’ preferences regarding being addressed by first or last name.

- Learning to take feedback and criticism and turning it into a learning experience is a challenge. Remember
  
  *Do not take criticism personally.
  
  *Do not defend your actions. Take time to think about any disagreements you may have with the feedback.

  *Thank your supervisor for the feedback.

  *Put it to good use.

  WHEN IT IS TIME TO LEAVE

- If you decide to quit or are asked to leave, remember, it may be a difficult situation for everyone involved. When all parties are gracious, the outcome is more positive.

- Just as you would be hurt by others saying negative things about you, it is hurtful to complain about others when a business relationship has been terminated. Focus on the positive.
SECTION III

ASSESSING THE CLIENT/DETERMINING NEEDS

The greatest challenge in performing massage in a spa setting is to determine the needs of the client in the brief time it takes to walk from the waiting room to the massage room. During those few minutes and while we settle into the room, we must establish some rapport and the beginnings of trust, find out what the client wants, and start to sense what physical and emotional limitations we must work around.

Of course, assessment should continue throughout the massage through observation of breathing and asking for feedback. There are tools to determine what this client wants very early on in the encounter.

ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION

In Chapter 2 we emphasized the importance of establishing a safe environment. Now we need to take in information so that we can give the client the massage experience she desires.

- Begin your assessment as you walk to the treatment room. Obvious lack of symmetry or limping can indicate areas to emphasize in the massage.

  Direct questions are the best for understanding your client’s condition. Simply say, “I notice your right shoulder is higher than the left one. Have you had
an injury to it?” In the case of recent injury or extreme tenderness, explain that you will need to get feedback from her as you work on that area.

- **How much experience does she have getting massage? When was her last massage?**

  If a client has little experience with massage or has not had massage recently, it is best to go more lightly than with someone who receives regular massage. Inexperienced clients may be less likely to give feedback or to express their needs. Check more regularly for feedback and comfort level.

- **Does she want to be “taken apart” or “put back together”?**

  In general, when a person complains about an ache or pain, she wants that area “opened up.” This includes progressively deeper work that stretches the muscle tissue in that area. In other words, she wants to be “taken apart,” at least for specific parts of the massage.

  When someone shares she has been having a stressful time in terms of demands placed on her or a difficult time emotionally, she may need a more soothing massage. Often, the attention needed to be open for deep work is more than she wants to devote to the massage. She wants to relax and be “put back together.” This does not mean the massage must be monotone, but that deeper strokes should be approached more slowly.

- **Does she want a full body or spot massage?**

  In a half-hour treatment, it is rare to do a full body massage and it is best to discourage it. If the client wants a full body and it is possible to upgrade the service to one hour (checking both your schedule and hers) it will be appreciated. Of course, this must be done at the start of the session. Be sure to notify the front desk of any changes in the schedule.
For any massage, check if there are areas that want special attention. If there is more than one area, you may suggest a spot massage, even for a one hour treatment. This might include doing the whole backside of the body including soles of the feet, then turning her over and working the neck and shoulders, scalp, and face. This usually will include any areas of special need. Obviously, put extra attention on any areas of special request.

If there are no areas that demand special attention, give a well balanced massage in the time allotted.

**AREAS TO AVOID**

- Different establishments have different guidelines for areas that are not included in the massage. These may include the abdomen and the buttocks. Usually, it is considered appropriate to work these areas over the drape.

- Many women prefer to not have their abdomens massaged. If there is no policy regarding this area, check with each client at the start of the massage to see if she wants this included in the treatment.

- Do not work under the drape. The message conveyed by the drape is that it is an area that is off limits. Respect this boundary.

- If the client has just had a facial, never touch her face. If she has a facial scheduled for later, a brief face massage will suffice.

- Check if it is alright to mess up your client's hair. If you use oil for your face strokes, check if you may get oil in her hair.

- Ask if your client has any recent injuries, bruises, or rashes and avoid these areas. Watch during the massage for any problems she may have forgotten to tell you about.
• Determine if there are other areas to avoid, especially ticklish feet. Don’t try to “cure” someone of ticklishness: respect each person’s limits.

• Estimate your client’s comfort level based on unspoken clues. Wearing underwear or having legs close together may indicate these are areas to avoid. Never pull a client’s legs apart.

Establish feedback regarding pressure. Check in a few minutes into the massage. If you have any doubts, ask for feedback about pressure a few times during the massage.
SECTION IV

SCOPE OF TREATMENT

Every profession has limits to its scope of treatment. Massage is no exception. It is important to remember what those limits are:

- Massage therapists do not have the legal right to diagnose physical or psychiatric conditions.
- Massage therapists do not have the legal right to treat specific conditions unless we are working under the supervision of a physician.

LIMITS TO TREATMENT

It may be tempting to offer to “fix” or “heal” a client…and it is important not to for the following reasons:

* This could be considered practicing medicine without a license.
* No one can guarantee the success of an intervention.
* As an employee of a spa, you represent that establishment. The spa could be held liable for your actions.

INSTEAD...if a client complains of persistent pain, recommend that she see her medical doctor, chiropractor, or naturopathic doctor. Explain the importance of diagnosis before an appropriate treatment plan can be designed.
OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Massage therapists often have philosophical differences with other health care professionals, especially those practicing allopathic medicine. It is best to keep those opinions to yourself.

Alternative or integrative medicine is becoming increasingly well known. Still, you may be the first “alternative” practitioner some clients have encountered. It may be appropriate to suggest (without attachment) that a client consider using the services of a chiropractor or naturopathic doctor. This can be communicated in a way that does not condemn allopathic medicine.

Always promote your profession. For clients who are new to massage, recommend places they could find a reputable massage therapist when they return home such as spas, health clubs, and chiropractors offices. Suggest they ask friends who receive massage for recommendations.
SECTION V

BOUNDARIES/LIMITS TO DISCLOSURE

TALKERS

We all know that the best massages are those received in silence.

Unfortunately, clients don't always know this. Some of them appear more comfortable getting massage with a conversation. Suggestions for helping to minimize conversation include:

* Conversation is normal during the first five to ten minutes of a massage. It gives the client a chance to unwind and to find out just who is touching her.

* If this is a first massage for your client, as you instruct her on receiving massage, inform her that the best massages are those with limited conversation.

* If she still wants to talk, be sure that she initiates the conversation.

* Press somewhat deeply into an area and ask her how it feels. This may help her to focus on her body.

* Keep the conversation focused on her or on neutral issues.

* Keep the conversation positive.

* Any information about yourself should be brief and positive.
LIMITS TO DISCLOSURE

Self-disclosure is an effective tool when it is used to normalize a situation. For example, if a client says she feels nervous about receiving massage, you might say, “I usually feel nervous for the first few minutes of a massage until I sense that I can trust the massage therapist.” This communicates that

1. You understand her feelings.
2. They are normal feelings.
3. By telling her when your nervousness resolves, you give her a guideline for expecting when she might overcome her own nervousness.

BOUNDARIES

A teacher suggests the “metaphor in which the therapist becomes invisible during the session” (Spiegel, 1995). The idea is to put the focus of the session always on the client. In order to do this, it is important to remember the agreement between you and the client: she gives you money and you give her a massage.

Additional benefits to you may include increased self-esteem from doing a good job, status that arises from working at your establishment, and added professional experience. Looking to the experience for more than this may constitute a violation of your unspoken agreement with the client. This might include using the session to establish a friendship, to unload feelings, or to have a sexual experience.

Guidelines for psychotherapists are especially stringent but they can provide a point of reference for massage therapists. One rule of professional conduct for therapists is to avoid “dual relationships.” A dual relationship is one in which the “professional assumes more than one role” (Corey, 1993, p95). This
could include the role of friend, counselor, or sexual partner. It is best to develop these types of relationships outside the professional arena.

Doing this intimate type of work at times when one's sexual needs are not being met in her private life can be especially difficult. In addition to endangering the client/massage therapist relationship, it can cause shame in the therapist. At such times, it is best to discuss such feelings and needs with a trusted colleague to help gain perspective.

**A PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

When you do a massage, remember you are representing yourself, the establishment you work for, and the massage profession as a whole. Being in a caring profession means you have to start with taking care of yourself. Then you can move with integrity throughout your career.
Guidelines in the psychotherapeutic professions can help massage therapists to understand the nature and importance of confidentiality. Therapists are required to maintain absolute confidentiality except in cases of court-ordered disclosure. It is unlikely that massage therapists will be burdened with information during a session that would end up in a court case, but absolute confidentiality is a good guideline.

* In the relaxed atmosphere of the massage room, clients may share intimate details of their lives.
* Sometimes massage therapists have experiences with clients that are private in nature.
* Massage therapists may see details of clients’ bodies that are not normally exposed.

All of these situations provide privileged information that cannot be disclosed in public!

Additionally, in a spa setting, massage therapists sometimes work on celebrities. While this may be exciting, it is important to remember a massage is a private moment in a public person’s life. Talking about massaging a celebrity is a breach of confidentiality.
We all need to talk about the highlights of our day and we often need to process information. Who can you talk with?

Psychotherapists tell their therapists privileged information. The therapist's vow to confidentiality guarantees information will go no further. This could become an expensive and inconvenient way for massage therapists to download their days!

Often, a massage therapist will choose one trusted friend to share information with in confidence. This may include a partner or another massage therapist who may exchange confidential information in return. This is an accepted way to share your day and to discharge information.
SECTION VII

SELF-CARE FOR THERAPISTS

Those who enter the caring professions sometimes forget the most important person to care for...themselves! Self-care helps to avoid burnout and injury. It makes the difference between entering a session feeling ‘full’ versus being needy. Those who care for themselves care for their careers through continuing education.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF

PHYSICALLY

Workout

Massage is physical work. The best way to avoid injury and to develop strength is through physical conditioning. Some spas have workout areas they make available to employees. Otherwise, create a program through a health club or center that includes building and stretching muscles.

Get massaged

Getting massaged will not only improve your sense of well-being...it will improve your massage, as well. It is not possible to give a good massage if you do not receive them regularly...you forget what feels good.
Some spas offer spa night for employees when massage therapists can exchange massage or treatments. This is a great way to find out what that new scrub feels like! If exchanging at work is not an option, do exchanges with fellow employees away from work.

**Pace yourself**

Ignoring family duties in favor of work, not taking time to relax, and not getting adequate sleep can all contribute to burnout. Symptoms of burnout include

* Feeling exhausted and overwhelmed.
* Feeling bored.
* Feeling resentful of those who *don’t* push themselves.
* Losing your sense of humor.

Make sure your schedule, both at work and home, is reasonable for you. Eating well, exercising, limiting smoking and alcohol consumption, and napping can help avoid burnout.

**Have that “spa glow”**

Spas are about self-care. Everyone who works at a spa should make an effort to exemplifying that ideal. If you cannot afford services at the spa, learn to do them for yourself. The spa’s aesthetician will be happy to help with your skin care. The manicurist may give you a lesson in keeping your own hands well groomed. The hair stylist can give you tips on always having a good hair day. Don’t forget to give them a shoulder rub in exchange for their advice!
EMOTIONALLY

Taking care of emotions is an important part of self-care. Many people who enter the health care profession are better at anticipating and caring for other people’s emotional needs than for their own. Feelings that may accompany this state include:

* Feeling you don’t deserve as much as others do.

* Having trouble saying ‘no.’

* Feeling resentful when you say ‘yes.’

* Feeling resentful of others who take better care of themselves.

If you can identify with some of these feelings, you may have issues of co-dependency. Check your library for books to help to deal with these issues. Twelve-Step Groups such as CODA and Al-Anon can offer free help and support.

Other feelings can arise when doing the very intimate work of massage. If you find yourself troubled by anger or sadness, it is possible you have connected with some unresolved feelings through your work. Groups can provide an affordable way to get help in processing these feelings. For more serious issues you may want to find a private therapist.

INTELLECTUALLY

Continuing education

Doing massage is a high output job. It is important that massage therapists focus on input both for themselves and to grow with their profession. You may find once you have perfected a skill that you develop a new interest to pursue.
This may include further studies in massage or anatomy, or exploring issues in psychology or spirituality.

If you feel the need for input but are not sure of a direction, ask your supervisor for suggestions that might increase your marketability at the spa. Also consider continuing with your academic education. The status of the field of massage improves as practitioners get advanced degrees and you may find you can contribute to your profession in new ways.

*Continued growth and learning are some of the best ways to avoid burnout and to contribute to your career and your profession.*
SECTION VIII
EMERGENCIES

Establishing a sense of safety is an important part of the spa and massage experience. When spa staff is trained in emergency protocol, that "sense" becomes a reality. There are three types of emergencies staff needs to be trained to handle:

1. individual medical emergencies
2. evacuation for an imminently dangerous situation
3. on-site, present emergencies that require immediate evacuation

INDIVIDUAL MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

Due to the low stress nature of the spa experience, it is unusual for stress-related medical emergencies, such as heart attacks and strokes, to occur at spas. Still, accidents can happen. A prepared staff is equipped to assist guests (or each other) to help minimize injury.

Many spas require cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, training for all staff. This hands-on training includes learning to administer abdominal thrusts for choking victims, giving rescue breathing, and doing CPR. It is recommended that all health care professionals attend CPR classes and regularly renew their certification.

First aid and safety training can be obtained through the American Red Cross. Their Emergency Action Steps include:

1. Check the scene and the victim.
* It is usually best to not move a victim. However, sometimes the situation is such that she is safer being moved.

* Get bystanders to help. Get information about what occurred to the victim. Send someone for help.

2. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.

* Give address, phone number, and directions to the dispatcher so that emergency crews can find you.

* Call spa or hotel security.

* Send someone to watch for emergency crews.

* Be prepared to give as much information as possible to the dispatcher.

    Be sure to include:

* What happened, such as a fall, apparent heart attack, etc.

* What is the condition of the victim. Is she conscious, bleeding, experiencing pain?

* What help is being administered.

3. Care for the victim.

* If the victim is conscious, get her permission before caring for her.

* If you do not have first aid training, focus on calming and reassuring her. If she is bleeding profusely, apply pressure with a towel to the wound. (American Red Cross, 1993).

Remember to take a few deep breaths yourself and stay calm. Help is on the way!
EVACUATION

Evacuations take place when there is the threat of a potentially dangerous event. This might include a fire in the neighborhood, flooding, or extreme weather conditions. While evacuations should be conducted as quickly as possible, there is often time for you and guests to collect belongings before leaving. When the evacuation announcement is made, find out how much time you have to exit.

In the event of an evacuation, the following protocols should be observed:

* If you are doing a massage, help your guest off the table and into her robe and slippers. Lead her to the dressing area and instruct her to collect her belongings. If there is time, you may leave her, get your things and return for her.

* Help any guests who do not have a staff member looking after them.

* Inform guests they can meet up with their friends at the predetermined meeting place. Human resources can inform you of emergency evacuation plans and meeting places.

* Lead your guest and any others who need help out the nearest exit and to a safe gathering spot. As you leave the facility, watch for any guests who may be disoriented or who have not been informed of the evacuation.

Staying calm and level-headed is the best guarantee of a swift and safe evacuation!
EMERGENCIES THAT REQUIRE IMMEDIATE EVACUATION

In the event of an emergency that requires immediate evacuation you will be helped by knowing where the emergency exits and meeting places are and by understanding the layout of the facility. Take time as you walk around the spa to plan an emergency evacuation. As you do this

* Look for two exits out of every room.

* Get a sense of distances; for example, how many steps are from your massage room to the emergency exit?

IN CASE OF FIRE

* If you are doing a massage, get your client off the table and into her robe and slippers.

* Check the door for heat with the back of your hand.

  * If it is hot, do not open it. Check the other door.

  * If there is only one door and no window, then you must exit even if there are smoke or flames.

* Crawl under smoke to the exit.

* If there are flames, wrap yourself and your client in sheets and run through the flames. If you have water in the room wet down the sheets before using them.

* Get out as quickly as possible. Help any other people you encounter. Do not go for belongings. Do not allow your client go for belongings or to look for her friends. Tell her she can meet them outside.

Do not go back into the building for any reason!
OTHER EMERGENCIES

If you live in an area that has extreme types of weather, such as tornadoes, or that has earthquakes, familiarize yourself with safety procedures in case of their occurrence. With both earthquakes and tornadoes, danger is possible from the collapse of structures and from flying glass and objects.

* If you have any warning of either of these occurrences, try to locate yourself and your client in an internal room.

* Position yourself under a braced area such as a door frame. Under a massage table is a good place to seek shelter.

* Stay in a low crouched position.

* Evacuate as soon as possible.

In the event of a chemical leak in the vicinity:

* Stay inside the building

* Close windows and doors

* Turn off all ventilating systems (air conditioners or heating).

* Keep phone calls short and to a minimum.

* Turn on a radio or television for emergency instructions.

*Familiarize yourself with these procedures. Studies show that survivors of emergency situations are most likely to take prompt and level-headed action!
BIOGRAFICAL SKETCH

Susan Marie Pomfret, L.M.T. has practiced massage for 22 years. Out of this work came an interest in psychology that led her to attain a bachelor’s degree in psychology at Ottawa University. She graduated *cum laude* and received an award of distinction for her bachelor’s thesis titled *Psychoneuroimmunology: its implications for healthcare*. Ms. Pomfret wishes to contribute to the field of massage by consulting at spas and training teachers on ways to increase levels of professionalism. She has two daughters, Jessica and Nicole.