



RMTBC Student Scholarship Award

West Coast College of Massage Therapy

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**Advancing Massage Therapy within
an Evolving Healthcare System**

Massage Therapy is a recognized medical profession, but must now adapt to an ever-changing healthcare system. There is no doubt that the profession has made leaps and bounds in advancing its importance in healthcare, but a lack of respect by the wider healthcare community requires a plan of action. Registered Massage Therapists (RMTs) in British Columbia agree that to advance massage therapy within the healthcare system requires more public awareness, research based evidence, and degree status recognition of graduates (Shroff & Sahota, 2012).

Public awareness is key to advancing not only the profession, but its credibility. An article by Elizabeth McIntyre (2004) states that massage therapy is a widely accepted “complementary alternative medicine” in the United States. However, some still misunderstand its role and hold onto the idea that the primary goal of the profession is to only provide relaxation (Shroff & Sahota, 2012). In order to improve public awareness, efforts should be focused towards educating the wider healthcare community, including doctors who can provide information to their patients on the benefits of massage (LeBlanc, 2013). Shroff & Sahota (2012) found that RMT’s who took the time to educate their healthcare colleagues and the public about massage therapy, observed an increase in clientele. This trend was also found in another study, which demonstrated that when doctors were educated about the benefits of holistic practices, they began to refer patients more frequently (Berman, Bausell, Hartnoll, Beckner, & Baretta, 1999). Public knowledge of the role of massage therapy in several arenas is key to advancing the profession.

Research holds the credibility to any profession. However, as stated by Moyer, Dryden & Shipwright (as cited in Smith, Sullivan, & Baxter, 2010), “scientific research on massage therapy has only a short history (about 20 years) and although the quantity of massage therapy research has increased, the research infrastructure is still developing, and massage therapy is still in its infancy” (p. 47). This suggests that improvements can be made to devote more hours to research education in the current curriculum to increase interest and knowledge for future practitioners. Incorporating more hours of research will not only increase an RMT’s knowledge base, but will help gain respect from other professionals. Shroff & Sahota (2013) stated, “increasing the number and quality of studies examining the efficacy and safety of physiotherapy, nursing and chiropractic practice have helped these professions gain recognition from both other healthcare professionals and governing bodies of healthcare” (p.5). The profession of massage therapy must follow suit if it wishes to reach the same level of acceptability.

The rapidly evolving healthcare system is creating a competitive market for RMTs and related colleagues. Dryden (2014) states that a higher degree of education is required for massage therapists if they wish to address evolving health issues of Canadian citizens and to adapt to current employment markets. Higher education and degree status would open many doors for RMTs, putting the profession on par with fields such as nursing, physiotherapy, and chiropractic medicine. Dryden (2014) also suggests that allowing RMT’s to use their diploma towards obtaining undergraduate and graduate degree programs is another way to increase skills and recognition in the medical community. This will increase knowledge, along with critical thinking, communication, research, and leadership skills, allowing RMT’s to cope and thrive in an ever-changing health care environment.

As demonstrated above, RMT’s need to continue to educate the public and other health care professionals about the benefits of massage and its efficacy through more evidence based research. To do this, higher education is required. Continuing to improve skill sets and promote research is key to advancing the profession.

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