

Ramblemuse Position Paper: One Scope of Massage Practice

Within the context of state regulation of the practice of massage, only one scope of practice is warranted. This conclusion is based both on the proposed 250 and 500 hour tiers for massage and on the expected lack of specific differences in knowledge, skills, and abilities between them.

Differences in Training Requirements

Most current 500 hour training programs have been designed to meeting prerequisite requirements to allow students to sit for the “national certification” exam. The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) is a certifying agency (not a professional organization) recognized by the National Organization of Certifying Agencies; itself a non-governmental organization. The following are the only specific requirements for a 500 hour program to meet eligibility requirements set by the NCBTMB:¹

At least 100 in-class clock hours in anatomy/physiology.

At least 200 in-class clock hours in massage and/or bodywork theory and application.

This must include at least two (2) in-class clock hours of Ethics.

The remainder of in-class clock hours must be in a related field — something that completes a massage and/or bodywork program of study.

In contrast, the following is the breakdown of a 250 hour massage therapist training program as recommended in the analysis of hours done by the California Alliance of Bodywork Schools (CAMBS):²

171 Hours Theory Practice and Professionalism

37 Hours Anatomy and Physiology

15 Hours Business and ethics

10 Hours Self Care

7 Hours Contraindications

10 Hours Testing (cumulative)

The CAMBS 250 hour level is the upper recommendation of 100 hour, 180 hour, and 250 hour training levels within the CAMBS hour analysis. What is evident is that, apart from an extra 50 hours of general anatomy and physiology, the bulk of the hour difference between 250 and 500 hour training programs need only be in a field related to massage. There are no specific requirements and most often these hours are used for a general survey, without great depth, of multiple subpractices of massage. In fact, such a survey approach is encouraged by the wide and superficial scope of the NCTMB exam, which includes both topics of western anatomy and physiology and Eastern concepts of energetic meridians. The expected differences in training do not warrant differences in scope of practice.

¹ National Certification Exam Candidate Handbook, National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork, July 2003 <http://www.ncbtmb.com/Handbooks/2003/candidatehandbook_03.pdf>.

² Massage Hours Analysis, California Alliance of Massage & Bodywork Schools, <http://www.camassageschools.org/library/massage_hours.html>.

Student Life Experience

As a generalization, students opting for longer, single-block programs are likely to do so because they are at a stage of life during which they have fewer conflicting responsibilities. Often, they will be training in massage soon after completing secondary education. In contrast, those attracted to shorter, more modular programs often are older, are making career transitions, and approaching massage practice with considerable life experience. In general, such adult learners demand more focused training with expectations for immediate applicability³. If anything, the consideration of expected life experience would directly contraindicate a difference in scope of practice between tiers.

Professional Guidelines for Specific Subpractices of Massage

The massage profession has not developed objective guidelines oriented towards effective entry into different subpractices of massage. The lack of such guidelines, a number of massage subpractices, and criteria for determination of guidelines have been noted in an article by Grant.⁴ Tables from this article showing subpractices and criteria for training guidelines are reproduced here as Appendix I. The closest approach to such guidelines actually implemented is the CAMBS analysis of hours of training based on time to teach specific categories of content.⁵ Without the assurance that training differences are meeting specific needs for knowledge, skills, and abilities of specific subpractices, there is no objective basis for identifying differences in scope of practice.

Motivations for Tiers

The potential impact of implementing a 500 hour second tier would be as a possible aid to portability of credentials between states. However, given the extension of many state requirements beyond 500 hours or additional certification or specific curriculum requirements, such a benefit becomes unlikely.⁶ A 500 hour second tier would add complexity to California state regulation while achieving nothing in terms of portability between states that is not obtainable via existing voluntary education and certification mechanisms.

Keeping only the upper tier would incur unnecessary intrastate cost increases or limitations of service.⁷ Consumer benefit and differentiation within California could be improved by attaching an experience requirement (e.g. 250 hours) to the upper tier. Such an experience requirement would help to prevent the second tier from simply coding a marketing differentiation into occupational regulations as a focus for price differentiation and employer lobbying. If a differentiation between tiers based on 250 additional hours of training and 250 hours of experience is not sufficient motivation, the 500 hour tier should be eliminated.

Summary

Based on the analysis above, there is nothing to warrant any differentiation in scope of practice between the proposed 250 and 500 hour tiers.

³ Grant, KE: April 2003: *Half a Mind*, *Massage Today*, <<http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/04/06.html>>.

⁴ Grant, KE, March 2003: *Swimming Upstream Toward Effective Practice*, <<http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/03/13.html>>.

⁵ **Massage Hours Analysis**, California Alliance of Massage & Bodywork Schools, <http://www.camassageschools.org/library/massage_hours.html>

⁶ ABMP list of state requirements. <<http://www.massagetherapy.com/careers/stateboards.php>>

⁷ Cox, Carolyn, and Susan Foster, 1990: *The Costs and Benefits of Occupational Regulation*, Bureau of Economics, U.S. Federal Trade Commission, <http://www.ramblemuse.com/articles/cox_foster_exsum.html>.

Appendix I: Massage Subpractices and Criteria for Training Guidelines

Table 1: Listing and descriptions of suggested subpractices for which to create guidelines.

Subpractice	Description
Chair	Basic touch, stress management, & relaxation. Applicable to public settings
Clinical/Orthopedic	Range of motion, tendinosis treatment, injury recovery
Emotional Reconnection	Working with issues of grief and marginalization
Geriatric	Life quality enhancement, sensory stimulation, interpersonal connection
Hospital-Based	Pain and anxiety control, nurturing of the sick in a medical setting
Infant/Pediatric	Parental bonding, nurturing, sensory/emotional development
Postural	Improvement of muscle balance; freeing of fascial adhesions
Prenatal/perinatal	Increase of comfort and emotional support
Psychoneurological Integration	Aiding sensory integration with ADHD, autism, high sensitivity
Relaxation/Wellness	Stress management, nurturing, and interpersonal connection
Spa Modalities	Nurturing, pampering, skin health
Sports	Facilitation of athletics and movement; normalization of hypertonicity
Trauma/ Abuse Recovery	Emotional recovery, somatic reassociation, building touch trust

Table 2: Attributes of guidelines for effective practice.

Attribute	Discussion
Validity	Compliance with a guideline should clearly improve the effectiveness of early practice by those entering a subpractice of massage..
Reliability/Reproducibility	The evidence and process used should lead to essentially the same guidelines if produced by multiple independent groups of experts.
Applicability	Guidelines should be specific to the needs of each subpractice.
Flexibility	Guidelines should identify expected exceptions to the recommendations.
Clarity	Guidelines should use unambiguous language, define terms precisely, and use logical, easy-to-follow modes of presentation.
Multidisciplinary process	Guidelines should be developed by a process that includes participation by representatives of key affected groups.
Scheduled Review	Guidelines should include planned reviews to review new field experience or changing professional consensus.
Documentation	The procedures followed in developing guidelines, the participants involved, the evidence used, the assumptions and rationales accepted, and the analytic methods employed should be meticulously documented and described.