

The Pillars of the IJTMB—Looking More Closely at the Practice Section

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This editorial continues the exploration of the three pillars of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork*. We discuss opportunities in TMB practice to share experiences and learnings with the IJTMB community. Several exemplars of manuscripts published in the Practice Sections are shared for inspiration.

KEYWORDS: Massage therapy; practice; isolation; professional engagement

This editorial continues the exploration of the three pillars of the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork*. In our March 2024 issue, we examined research methodologies, methods, ethics, and knowledge translation in the context of therapeutic massage and bodywork (TMB). In this issue, we look at the practice section as we endeavour to inspire practitioners to share their experience and learnings with the IJTMB community.

PRACTICE AS THE INSPIRATION AND APPLICATION OF RESEARCH

The relationship between practice and research in TMB is both the starting point for new discoveries and the final stage where research findings are implemented. Practical experience often uncovers new questions and areas for study, driving the research agenda forward. Simultaneously, the application of research outcomes in practice enhances the effectiveness and broadens the techniques used in massage therapy.

Evidence-informed practice (EIP) encourages practitioners to use the best available research, together with their clinical expertise and the patient's preferences in clinical decision making.⁽¹⁾ When used effectively, EIP creates a process by which practitioners

assess the implementation of research findings, thereby creating new information of interest to the broader research community. Through their application of research findings and reflection on the impact, practitioners answer the question, "Were the research findings clinically relevant?"

Other healthcare professions, such as nursing and medicine, are continuing to develop mechanisms within the structure of their practice to facilitate asking new questions following the implementation of research into practice.⁽²⁾ These mechanisms support the continuation of the research cycle. In TMB, this structure is less prevalent due to the nature of our practices. For TMB researchers to benefit from what practitioners observe in clinical practice, we need a mechanism for this conversation. Publishing in the IJTMB can be one vehicle for dissemination.

EXTENDING BEYOND THE ISOLATION OF PRACTICE

The practice of TMB can be isolating, depending on the type of practice in which one engages.^(3,4) The act of publishing clinical experiences serves as a bridge, connecting practitioners across individual practices. It is important to disseminate personal insights and case studies or case reports, which not only enriches the collective knowledge base but also mitigates the professional isolation often encountered in this field. By sharing their therapeutic journeys in written form, practitioners contribute to a shared narrative, fostering a community of practice that is informed, cohesive, and collectively evolving.

BUT, WHAT WOULD I EVEN WRITE?

The field of massage therapy needs the exchange of professional knowledge and

experiences. This is an opportunity for practitioners to contribute to this body of knowledge by publishing their personal insights, detailed case studies or case reports, and scholarly reflections on their professional journey. The topics for contribution are infinite and include innovative treatment methods, client case progressions, or the development of wise professional practices. By fostering a culture of documentation and publication, massage therapists can collectively enhance the quality and effectiveness of their practice and of the profession more broadly.

Still not sure what you would write about? Consider the ideas below:

- Interesting patients and treatments through a case study or case series
- Challenges and successes in interprofessional collaboration or integrative healthcare settings or systems through a scholarly paper on lessons learned
- An analysis of your own ethical dilemma, or a public decision regarding an ethical issue, and the best available literature to support your analysis to assist community members to improve their practice
- Narrative reviews of research on a topic relevant to your practice
- Business issues grounded in entrepreneurial or business research.

Each of the above practice topics has a few things in common. First, they are areas where you are the expert. Second, they involve a “scholarly discourse.” It might sound intimidating, but really all it is asking is that you ground your discussion in other information that is out there. You can ask the question, “Is what I have experienced similar or different to what others have experienced?” and then talk about your answer and why. Finally, these topics are of interest to others in the TMB community.

If you have an idea, but are not sure how to get started, I recommend talking it over with a trusted colleague. They will help you to elaborate on your initial topic and ask you questions that will direct other information you might need to collect to get started. Then, if writing is not your thing, start by recording yourself talking about your topic. You can either use an app that will transcribe what you say, or you can type out your recording once you are comfortable with the direction your idea is taking.

Whatever process you engage in, it is important to tell your story to inform future research, inspire your TMB colleagues, and to demonstrate your expertise.

SOME INSPIRATION

In the Practice Section of the IJMTB, there are several articles that can serve as inspiration for those considering submitting. Here are just a few to get your mind imagining your next manuscript:

- **Zabel and Munk (2020)**—This article explores the utilization of practice-based research networks (PBRNs) within massage therapy, including their role in fostering collaborative research endeavours that bridge the divide between clinical practitioners and academicians.⁽⁵⁾ It is an excellent example of information about massage therapy practice that is of interest to clinicians, researchers, and educators.
- **Barraclough, Baskwill, Higgs, Neilson, Wilcox (2022)**—This article shares findings regarding the experience of work-related pain as reported by massage therapists.⁽⁶⁾ It is positioned in the practice section because it surveys massage therapists about a practice-based issue. It could also have been published in the research section, as the researchers used a survey design. The editorial team makes the decision based on relevance to clinical and professional practice.
- **Lebert, Noy, Purves, Tibbett (2022)**—The article “Massage Therapy: A Person-Centred Approach to Chronic Pain” discusses the emerging ethos of person-centred care within evidence-based medicine, highlighting its potential to enhance healthcare delivery.⁽⁷⁾ This is a wonderful example of a discussion or scholarly paper.
- **Juchli (2021)**—This case report is one of several high-quality examples in the IJMTB. It investigates the impact of massage therapy, incorporating proximal trigger point release, on a patient with plantar fasciitis.⁽⁸⁾ Each practitioner has had that individual who presents with an interesting case or has a treatment that created unexpected outcomes. This is the vehicle to share those experiences.

CONCLUSION

The Practice Section of the IJTMB is a special section that welcomes contributions from practitioners who can contribute their unique perspective to scholarship. I believe that there are many opportunities to exchange professional knowledge and experiences through publication to this section of the IJTMB. I hope that the articles highlighted above, and the list of suggestions, will inspire TMB practitioners to disseminate the lessons and innovations in their practices.

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