



Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

We read with delight and great interest the letter in your June 2009 issue from Dr. Martha Brown Menard regarding the need for building research capacity, aligning with academic educational institutions, and providing an option for massage practitioners “who wish to be considered health care practitioners” to graduate with a baccalaureate degree.

In preparation for massage practice in tomorrow’s workplace, baccalaureate-degree-based education for massage practitioners was implemented at Southern Institute of Technology in New Zealand in 2002. A second bachelor’s program has since been established in this country. The Southern Institute of Technology in Invercargill is a tertiary-degree-granting polytechnic (similar to a vocational or junior college in the United States). The developers and implementers of the Bachelor of Therapeutic and Sports Massage (BTSM) believed that higher academic education was the direction to move toward, enabling massage therapy to be recognized as a serious career choice and better meeting the needs of the health-related massage therapy service provider and the massage profession. Now, after eight years of implementing this program and after five cohorts of bachelor degree graduates, we believe that degree graduates are critical-thinking, reflective practitioners with technical and professional competence, sound reasoning, and research literacy, and that they have a capacity to manage knowledge and its acquisition during their working lives. They work with their hands, head, and heart. Their skills are developed through their interaction with a curriculum that is focused on applied knowledge, skills, and a developing evidence base, a firm foundation of general knowledge and critical thinking, personal and transferable skills and abilities, and a clinical education program encompassing more than 500 hours. Academic staff recognize massage students’ commitment to a three-year full-time course of study, their passion for massage, their caring attitude toward people, their blend of intellectual inquiry with hands-on skills, and their highly reflective professional approach.

Exposure to the research process has also benefitted faculty, students, and the wider New Zealand massage profession. Small-scale research projects have allowed students to build research literacy and capacity, with some Year 3 (final year) student projects being of a publishable standard. Faculty have up-skilled in areas of research, are research active, and follow a research-informed approach to their teaching. The results of this research are shared with the New Zealand massage profession via conference presentations, workshops, and the New Zealand Massage Therapy Research Centre website (<http://nzmtrc.sit.ac.nz>).

We applaud the visionary direction proposed by Dr. Menard, and we encourage others to strive to build a community of massage professionals who are not only clinically competent, but who can also have a role in the development of their profession’s knowledge base and identity. Degree-based massage therapy qualifications are needed to extend students and to provide massage therapists with academic training similar to that offered by other health care professionals. It also provides the stepping stone into subsequent graduate programs/study.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTIFICATION

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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