



The Massage Therapy Foundation: Focus on Education

KEYWORDS: Massage therapy education, distance learning

Greetings, esteemed reader. I have been graciously invited by Executive Editor Dr. Glenn M. Hymel to offer a guest editorial, and he has invited me to speak to one of my favorite topics: education in the massage therapy profession.

The Massage Therapy Foundation, as most readers probably know, is dedicated to advancing our profession through scientific research, education, and community service. Publishing the *International Journal of Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork* (IJTMB) is arguably the largest-scale project that the Massage Therapy Foundation has ever undertaken—in terms both of long-term financial commitment and the journal's potential to influence massage and bodywork communities now and in the future. It is my very great honor to contribute to these electronic pages a few thoughts about how the Massage Therapy Foundation and the IJTMB might continue to grow and flourish.

Volume 3, Number 1, of the IJTMB (March 2010) was by far the richest and most fully realized issue in the journal's short history, with lively and useful articles in every section. I expect that the volume and value of content will only increase as content from the Foundation's 2010 Highlighting Massage Therapy in CIM Research conference becomes available, and as the IJTMB moves toward being indexed in more research databases (which of course makes it more attractive to contributors). It is an amazing feeling to see the realization of a vision that is generational in scope: the students of the students of our students today will be grateful for the archives of the IJTMB.

I joined the Massage Therapy Foundation Board of Trustees in 2007 as a somewhat pie-eyed new trustee and chair of the Education committee. I was given not only freedom, but enthusiastic encouragement to develop a vision for what the Foundation's Education committee could be and do for the profession. Because I came to this position as a teacher with a long history in both core and continuing education classrooms, I carried a certain point of view about what I would like to see the Foundation do in the context of its commitment to education as an avenue to advance the profession.

I am now the president of the Massage Therapy Foundation, and my passion for developing strategies and support systems for massage therapy education is unabated.

I believe that the future of our profession depends on the seeds of skills that are sown in the classroom, and that massage therapy educators may be the most underserved population in our profession. I work with schools and attend meetings for educators and school administrators, and it is sad to see how often well-meaning but underprepared teachers are put in front of a classroom simply because no one else is available. The fact that many massage therapy students are not traditional learners makes this quandary especially challenging.

The Massage Therapy Foundation has several programs currently in place to help raise the bar for massage education in general and research competence in particular. The Student Case Report Contest is an annual international event that invites students to submit top-notch case reports for review, possible publication, presentation at a national meeting, and substantial cash prizes. The IJTMB and the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies* generously make themselves available as publication venues for winners who undergo the peer review process; we hope to see this year's winners make an appearance here before the end of 2011.

With support from the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), we make educational research sessions at the AMTA national meeting available and attractive. This effort brings basic information about research to our massage and bodywork practitioner colleagues who might not otherwise be drawn in that direction. We recruit and review presenters for the dedicated Research track, and we also compile the poster session for that event. In addition, the AMTA always reserves a highly desirable spot on their schedule for an annual presentation of current findings to the profession. This panel is composed of our Case Report Contest winners and other researchers who have information for which our colleagues are hungry. At the 2010 meeting, we will focus on pediatric massage research, with presentations from Shay Beider, Sheila Wang, PhD; Karen Boulanger, NCTMB, MS; and Sean Phipps, PhD.

Our Teaching Research Literacy (TRL) program sends seasoned educators on the road to work with massage school faculties to help weave research literacy concepts into existing curriculum. This project is important, but is necessarily limited by time and travel constraints. We will soon be partnering with Education and Training Solutions, LLC, to take advantage of research suggesting that carefully designed online curriculum works as well or better than traditionally

delivered content does^(1,2,3). TRL–Distance Learning will allow us to work with massage educators, unbounded by scheduling conflicts or geography. We hope to launch TRL–DL in late 2010 or early 2011.

In addition to those initiatives and projects, the IJTMB's open-source policy makes first-rate content available to every reader, including students, and its Education section provides an avenue for the publication of research specifically directed to massage therapy educators. I have deeply appreciated the work that has already appeared in the IJTMB Education section, and I hope to see our colleagues use this opportunity ever more imaginatively to share their ideas about how to support educators and thereby raise the bar for massage therapy education.

We are all teachers; we are all learners. The clients we touch with massage and bodywork, the students we touch with knowledge about the glories of human functioning, and the colleagues we touch with our enthusiasm for our field, all benefit from our wisdom—and we benefit in return from their generosity and willingness to share. Together, the Massage Therapy Foundation and the IJTMB will continue to be sources of information and inspiration for our beloved profession.

Ruth Werner, LMP, NCTMB
President, Massage Therapy Foundation
Waldport, OR

CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTIFICATION

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

COPYRIGHT

Published under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.

REFERENCES

1. Means B, Toyama Y, Murphy R, Bakia M, Jones K, Center for Technology in Learning. *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development; 2009.
2. Hugenholtz NI, de Croon EM, Smits PB, van Dijk FJ, Nieuwenhuijsen K. Effectiveness of e-learning in continuing medical education for occupational physicians. *Occup Med (Lond)*. 2008; 58(5):370–372.
3. Dell CA, Low C, Wilker JF. Comparing student achievement in online and face-to-face class formats. *J Online Learn Teach*. 2010; 6(1):n.p. http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/dell_0310.htm. Published March 2010. Accessed May 18, 2010.