



EVOLUTION OF AN INDUSTRY PART 4

Essential Ethics for the Massage Profession

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The need for Ethical Boundaries for the Massage Profession cannot be stressed enough

Confusion reigns particularly across Asia in regard to Ethics. It is essential that Businesses and therapists understand that a reputation can mean the success or demise of a business. Business management and therapists need to be absolutely clear at all times about ethical boundaries and professional limits. It is also of absolute importance that all Therapists working in the Massage Industry are clear and understand what may be considered unethical, unprofessional behaviour and in some countries, illegal. It is highly recommended that Resorts and Spas/Salons who want to create a high standard of professionalism create an ethics policy for their business and that this policy is understood by all staff including receptionists, therapists etc.

The Therapist not the Client has the Responsibility

Touching clients inappropriately or with sexual intent is unethical and may be considered illegal in many countries particularly in western countries. The therapist not the client has the responsibility to enforce this ethical boundary. Having any kind of sexual contact with a client, while they are a client, in treatment time or outside treatment time may be seen as unprofessional, unethical and may lead to dismissal and/or legal action. It is not acceptable behaviour at anytime to have any type of sexual contact with a client. Crossing this ethical boundary may discredit the business and the therapist. Therapist and businesses alike need to make a clear distinction between massage in the sex industry and massage in the therapy industry.

BE AWARE unethical behaviour may cost a therapist their career, reputation, financial penalty and in more serious cases of illegal behaviour a jail sentence.

Vulnerable Areas

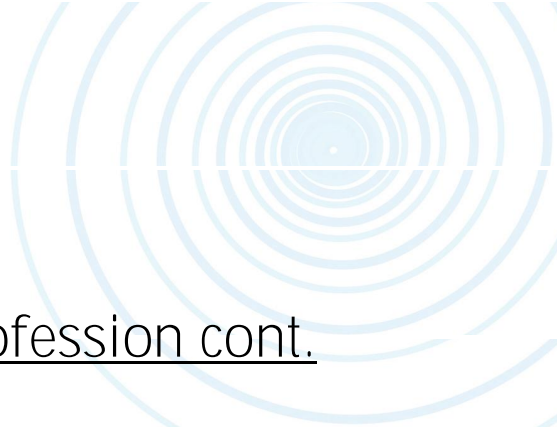
If it is necessary to work near the groin, buttocks or chest areas be extremely sensitive and discuss and gain consent from your client in regard to what you propose to do prior to commencement. Often massage work performed with the best intention can be perceived and experienced totally different by the client. Not explaining your proposed treatment plan and why there might be a need to work near vulnerable areas may invite a strong reaction or a feeling of unsafety from your client. Be aware that certain areas of the body demand more awareness and sensitivity. If it is necessary to work near vulnerable areas it is of absolute importance that you have the client's approval prior to touching those areas and preferably before the commencement of the client's treatment.

Differences Eastern & Western Massage

Across Asia traditional styles of massage treatments including Thai Massage and Shiatsu are often a preferred choice for the Asian client who has experienced these therapies often for decades. In western countries Asian styles of treatment are available however have gained less popularity than European style treatments which may include Therapeutic, Remedial, Trigger Point, Myofascial Release etc.

All bodywork and massage therapies have enormous benefits for clients if the therapist has had adequate and reliable training. Unfortunately in many cases training to a high standard has not been available and many salons and spas offer in house training to therapists who have a desire to work in the massage industry but no real knowledge about anatomy and physiology or when not to massage or when massage may be damaging to a client.

To many western clients the perception of a massage treatment is considerably different.



Essential Ethics for the Massage Profession cont.

Obvious Point of Difference

More commonly than not across Asia therapists as part of their regular routine climb onto the table with their client. This is not done in western styles of massage and unbeknown to many well-intended Asian therapists this may be experienced as unethical and not appropriate. This is definitely Thai or Shiatsu style but unfortunately the thought of a therapist straddling a client or even sitting on a client's backside is certainly not an attractive experience to many western clients. In particular if it is a female therapist working on a male client this style of behaviour may definitely be interpreted as sexual and make the client feel uncomfortable. In the majority of cases the client will never express this to the therapist or the spa/salon but will choose not to return and look elsewhere for a more professional approach to treatment. It is not uncommon to hear western clients who have experienced "the therapist with them on the table" to make jovial comments to their friends and families. For those businesses including spas, salons and resorts it is recommended that treatments menus provide options so that clients can choose not to have "the therapist on the table" experience.

Treatment time is the client's time.

It is advised that therapists keep their private life private and separate. Disclosing private information about one's own life is definitely not in the client's best interest. Disclosure of personal information should be limited at all times. Personal details should remain the therapists own personal business. Client's need to be met with warmth, safety, validation and support, without being drawn into the therapists own needs.

In Australia and other western countries massage therapists undergo extensive training. In these countries there are professional standards of education that need to be met prior to a therapist practicing their skills in their chosen career as a massage therapist. Highly skilled massage therapists are sort after and they offer clients treatment based massage with viable effective outcomes, which assist clients to recover from injury, accident and/or structural problems. These therapists in western countries belong to professional organisations which also allow the therapist added credibility and also in many cases health insurance rebates for clients.

It is also more common than not that massage therapists acquire professional indemnity insurance which covers them for malpractice but does not cover them for unethical misconduct. If a therapist has crossed the ethical boundary professional associations and organisations who require their members to uphold not only codes of ethics but also codes of practice. When a therapist crosses this boundary these professional organisations no longer consider the therapist as a suitable member of the massage profession. The therapist is disqualified and in some cases legal action taken which has resulted in jail sentencing. The Australian Traditional Medicine Society is Australia's largest natural therapy association and currently have professional members from 22 differing modalities including Naturopathy, Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Shiatsu and a variety of Massage modalities.

Following are some segments from the Australian Traditional Medicine Society's 'Code of Ethics'.

As a member of my profession I shall at all times abide by the following code of ethics.

1. I shall conduct myself professionally at all times so as to comply with the generally accepted standards of moral behaviour and decency.
2. I shall, in accordance with wholistic principles, render my professional services for no other purpose than the total well being of my patients.
3. I shall at all times keep the standard of my professional work as high as possible. I shall endeavour to improve upon my wholistic and technical skills and professional standards whenever possible.
4. I shall ensure that anyone employed by me shall strictly adhere to the same code of ethics as long as he/she is employed by me.
5. I shall upon being found to have transgressed any of the rules of the society and/or code of ethics voluntary surrender my membership.
6. I shall display a copy of this code of ethics in my consultation rooms where it is clearly visible to all patients.



Essential Ethics for the Massage Profession cont.

Confidentiality

A Therapist should not disclose information obtained in confidence from or about a client unless consent has been given. What the client discusses with the therapist is confidential material and should not be discussed outside the client's therapy time.

What would constitute crossing the ethical boundary?

What counts is what intention the therapist, consciously or unconsciously, is expressing, perhaps just by a look or a remark. When the therapist's, words or gestures are expressing their own personal needs or desires for this specific client then the ethical boundary has been crossed.

Background of School of Integrated Body Therapy, Australia Pty Ltd (SIBT)

The largest specialty massage school in Australia, established in 1985. During SIBT's growth it has aided and witnessed the evolution of massage as a highly respected, viable profession in Australia. These years of experience have allowed SIBT to develop and offer reliable and sound skills-based professional training. SIBT's philosophy embraces a wholistic approach to healing, wellbeing and recovery through massage and bodywork.

SIBT provides cutting edge training with a focus on the latest hands-on techniques and skills. SIBT is an Australian Government Registered Training Organisation and is accredited by three major Australian professional associations:

- Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS),
- Association of Massage Therapists (AMT),
- Reflexology Association of Australia (RAA).

SIBT currently has the assistance of the Australian Trade Commission to export education and has successfully completed over 22 courses throughout Asia over the last 3 years.

The School's website is www.massageschool.com.au

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Maggie is a Life Member of the Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS) and has been an Executive Director of ATMS for 18 years, 9 of those years as Vice President. ATMS is the largest professional association for the Natural Therapies Industry in Australia. She has been structurally and politically involved in the development of the Massage profession in Australia. Maggie is also the Founder/Director of Lake Spa Healing, Therapy & Education Centres, Australia, and has an ongoing commitment to sharing knowledge throughout the world and assisting other countries to raise educational standards and awareness in regard to massage as a viable health and wellness therapy and for its treatment of pain and dysfunction.

