Massage Therapists’ Association
Of British Columbia

Our
BC Conversation on Health
Presentation
“As your government continues to improve patient care, it will devote new energy and new resources to prevention. It will explore new ways to integrate alternative health care options into our mainstream health care system.”

Speech from the Throne
The Honourable Iona Campagnolo
Lieutenant Governor
Province of British Columbia
February 13, 2007
The Massage Therapists' Association of British Columbia is pleased to make this presentation to the BC Conversation on Health.

The main focus of our submission will be in response to the question asked by the Premier “How do we ensure our system is sustainable for British Columbians in the long term?”

**Who are we?**

British Columbia has over 2,000 Registered Massage Therapists (RMTs) working primarily in private practice throughout the province. RMTs have been regulated under the Health Professions Act since 1946, and are licensed by the College of Massage Therapists of BC. We are affiliated with the Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance nationally.

British Columbia’s RMTs have the highest standards of training in North America and arguably in the world. Recently, Thompson Rivers University allowed our 3-year diploma program graduates to ladder to their Bachelor of Health Science Degree Program. We are currently exploring other post-secondary options to further expand the knowledge base of our profession.

RMTs are educated and trained to accurately assess and treat the body with techniques that include massage and manual therapy, joint mobilization, hydrotherapy, and active therapies and rehabilitative exercise such as stretching, strengthening, postural exercise and patient education.
**More RMTs, A More Healthy Population**

Massage Therapy is an effective approach to pain management and rehabilitation. RMTs are incorporating evidenced-based practices for a wide range of conditions such as migraine headaches, arthritis, osteoporosis, fibromyalgia, sports injuries, as well as many other common conditions related to soft tissue and joint dysfunction. They can also provide supportive treatment for pain and symptom management of cancer care as well as palliative cancer. Many cancer survivors use massage therapy post surgery for mobility, pain management and lymphedema treatment.

Massage therapy is highly accessible in B.C. This is due to its representation in every health region and its recognition by other health care professions. RMT coverage is predominately privately funded by individuals and their extended health care plans. Coverage can also occur through MSP, ICBC, RCMP, WorkSafeBC and Veterans Affairs. RMTs in BC work with physicians, chiropractors and other health care professionals and meet the requirements of conventional medical practitioners, as outlined by Health Canada Guidelines.

**Spending Health Care Dollars Wisely**

Pressure on health budgets seems to be never ending for all governments including BC.

Our profession is committed to improving the health status for all British Columbians. We strongly believe the old adage “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” In fact, over the past 30 years, Canadian and international studies have shown that promoting health and preventing disease keep populations healthier and living longer, resulting in less days of work missed, billions of dollars in savings to the health care system, and more productive economies. RMTs can play an important role in ensuring our health care system is cost effective!

The BC Government has also demonstrated its commitment to prevention and wellness, with its commitment to ActNowBC and other initiatives such as tobacco cessation programs. We commend you for contributing to a culture of health and wellness in British Columbia. This new culture will produce the obvious positive outcome – good health; but it will also produce a population that understands and takes more responsibility for their own health, which will assist in stemming the ballooning health care budget.
Registered Massage Therapists work towards providing the full spectrum of health care services: health promotion, disease prevention and treatment. Because visits typically last 30-45 minutes, massage therapists are valuable primary health care providers who have one of the highest ratio 1:1 time spent with their patients. RMTs’ educational messages greatly assist patients in developing healthier lifestyles, addressing their own health and wellness needs and, where appropriate, self-managing chronic and acute conditions.

**Effectively Using British Columbia’s RMTs**

Currently, legislation does not allow RMTs to practice to the full extent of their training. Broadening their scope of practice in line with that training would assist patients, and fill a growing need for health care professionals in the province. For example, RMTs are trained to effectively diagnose musculoskeletal conditions. The ability to diagnosis is risk free and would not negatively impact the health care budget, but would allow RMTs to better utilize their skills and training in order to serve their patients more effectively.

While RMTs primarily work as private health care providers, we believe that their abilities could be used within the public health care system. Our practitioners are relatively young, with the average RMT in their early 30s, so as a source of human resources in the health sector, we offer long term workforce commitment. Integrating massage therapists into hospitals, community health centres, educational institutions, community centres, sporting facilities, workplaces, neighbourhood houses and elsewhere would offer the benefits of massage therapy to a broader audience, producing a healthier population.

RMTs treat many of their patients’ health care needs from arthritis care to cancer care. They also treat and assist in the management of other conditions such as asthma, burns, cystic fibrosis, dermatitis (psoriasis), diabetes as well as some mental health issues including eating disorders (particularly bulimia) and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Patient education is an important part of the work that RMTs do every day. Whether it is teaching sport enthusiasts about their injury, post surgical rehabilitation, home/self care management education, injury prevention in the workplace, specific exercises to assist in the recovery process and management of chronic conditions, or the importance of stretching prior and post workouts, RMTs have a comprehensive body of knowledge and a broad range of skills.
Improving Services for Children

Massage therapy has been shown to improve the health of children and youth — those who are healthy and those who are challenged by health conditions. Studies have shown positive outcomes of massage therapy for healthy babies as well as infants who are premature, cocaine-exposed, HIV-exposed, and those with depressed mothers. Childhood conditions that have been positively impacted by massage therapy include: attention deficit disorder, autism, developmental delays, eating disorders (particularly bulimia), juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Cognitive performance and disrupted sleep patterns have also been seen to improve as a result of massage therapy treatment for children and youth.

Improving Services for Seniors.

RMTs assist seniors to meet the many challenges of healthy aging. RMTs can teach seniors how to move and lift to avoid future injury, and how to stabilize themselves to avoid falling. Falls in the elderly are a growing concern and massage therapy can be an effective treatment for those who have fallen. For those who depend on wheelchairs, RMTs can assist patients in avoiding painful and expensive pressure wounds and repetitive strain injuries.

RMTs also work to assist pain management, comfort and quality for those patients in palliative care both at home and in institutions.

Recommendations

We believe that the following would assist patients in accessing and utilizing an RMT.

1) Encourage personal responsibility for individuals’ health and wellness and focus 15% of the health care dollars on health promotion and education, and disease prevention. This would make BC a leader in health promotion. Since we already have a population that is very interested in healthy living, we could make great strides in this area, and become a world leader.
2) Expand the “Scope of Practice” for RMTs so that we may better assist British Columbia’s patients. Our extensive training specific to musculoskeletal conditions gives us the skills to diagnose and help improve the health status of British Columbians even more than we do now.

3) Encourage and open more opportunities for RMTs to work in an integrated health care system with other health care professionals, particularly in hospital settings. For example, other jurisdictions use Massage Therapists as part of the integrated team in hospital cancer care, maternity, orthopedic wards post surgery and respiratory units, just to name a few. Having an RMT on staff to support and treat patients in hospitals as part of an integrative medical approach to our overall health care system would have a significant positive impact on many patients’ health status. Given the advanced level of training of British Columbian RMTs, it would make sense to utilize this source of health care human resource to its full potential.

4) Increase the number of visits for supplementary health care providers for low-income patients from 10 to 15 visits.

RMTs are committed to restoring and maintaining optimal health and pain-free function of the body. Massage therapy is a safe, effective, drug free and evidence-based practice.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the membership of the

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President
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July, 2007