



Massage Today

June, 2001, Vol. 01, Issue 06

Advice to Future Massage Therapists

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Let the debate begin as to what to do about substandard schools. As more of the public accepts massage therapy based on word of mouth, or on research that proves it is effective, we face a dangerous backlash if the typical therapist cannot meet the public's expectations.

The rapid proliferation of massage/bodywork schools has created concerns regarding the quality of education being received by future therapists.

Of course there are many excellent schools, but there are more and more substandard programs that not only dole out substandard training, but do not even provide the courses and number of hours they advertise.

Practicing therapists have great influence over potential students. With that in mind, I offer these suggestions to future therapists and hope that practicing therapists, the primary audience of this publication, will pass them along.

So you want to become a massage therapist/bodyworker? You want to help people while earning a living doing something you love to do? Massage/bodywork may be the right opportunity for you. First, you must get some training. The best way to do this is to go to a school. Choosing the right school is one of the most important career decisions you will ever make.

How do you find the right school for you? The good news is that there are now lots of schools teaching massage/bodywork. The bad news is that many of them provide very poor quality education. Every field has its bad apples. The goal of this column is to help you avoid biting into one of them, especially on your first bite. Be aware that many schools do not actually provide all the hours and/or all the courses they promise in their promotional material. Do not completely trust any school's advertisements. Do some serious research. This is your career. You want to get off to the best start possible, don't you?

Consider several schools, and visit each one. Do you have the ability to move to another city or state? It may be worthwhile to attend a better program. If this is not an option, consider that it may be worth driving further to attend a better program, instead of the most convenient one. Visit each school several times. Try to meet and talk to several students. Would they enroll at this school if they had it to do all over again? Find some recent graduates of the school. Interview them about their experience. Ask pointed questions and get specific details. Be sure the graduates feel they received what they were promised. Realize that you may encounter a hard to please individual, or an easy to please one for that matter, so check with several others until you are comfortable.

Check with practicing therapists in the area for school recommendations. Keep in mind that some therapists are very loyal to their alma mater, so contact as many therapists in your area as you reasonably can. Try to find a consensus with which you are comfortable. If a consensus cannot be found, be suspicious and look further.

It is a good idea to get a massage from graduates of a school you are considering. Realize that one individual is not necessarily representative of the work taught at the school. You should be receiving professional massage if you intend to give it. This remains true after you graduate and are practicing as well!

Contact the state regulatory board, if the state has one. Have any schools you are considering had complaints filed against them? If they have, investigate further. Be sure the problem has been resolved. Sometimes a complaint process can cause a school to really shape up. Other times, it shows a major flaw you may want to avoid.

Also check with the State Department of Education. Consult The Better Business Bureau and The Chamber of Commerce. Often people will file complaints with these organizations instead of a government agency. If complaints have been filed against a school you are considering, be sure you are comfortable with the situation before signing up.

Be aware that there are many types of massage techniques. Massage/bodywork schools only provide entry-level training. That means just the basics. To specialize in a particular area or style, plan on taking additional courses during school and after graduation.

Once you have selected the school with which you are the most comfortable (and hopefully the most excited about attending), enroll. Here's a very important tip: It is your responsibility to be sure you receive all that

you were promised and paid for. Keep a diary or log of every hour you spend in school. Record the subject studied and the instructor. Are you getting the promised instructor, presenting the promised hours in each subject?

Should you accidentally wind up in a school that is not providing what you are paying for, you must be able to document the inadequacy in order to attain a remedy. A timely-kept diary is about the only way to do this. Do not do this in a hostile or suspicious manner. Do this as a professional habit of keeping accurate records. You will have to do it for your business, so you might as well start now. Hopefully you will find that you have received more than your money's worth! Should you discover you are not receiving the education you contracted for, what should you do? First, bring it to the attention of the school administration. Do not give them your log. Give them only a copy of it, or you may lose your evidence. If they do not remedy your complaint quickly, file complaints with the State Department of Education, the State Massage Board (if your state has one) and your local Better Business Bureau/Chamber of Commerce. Your local county attorney may also be of help. This sounds like a lot of hassle -- It is. However, it is the only way to protect yourself and to protect others in the future.

The unfortunate thing about entering this emerging new profession is there are some risks you must protect yourself from to ensure your success. The fortunate and exciting thing is the incredible opportunity available to you, to be the best that you can be and to help so many people.

Best wishes for a long, happy, healthy and prosperous career. Your hands are needed. Prepare them well.

Click [here](#) for more information about Ralph Stephens, BS, LMT, NCTMB.



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