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## **Fight for Your Rights!**

By Vivian Madison-Mahoney, LMT

I receive many e-mails from massage therapists regarding insurance and state licensing issues. It's interesting to learn how other states, cities, or municipalities operate in relation to the massage therapy profession.

I love to hear about massage therapists sticking up for their rights and the rights of the profession.

One such story comes from Steven S. Serra. I felt that portions of Steven's letter were worth sharing with you, with his permission:

This letter is in response to the well-written, thoughtful February 2002 piece in *Massage Today*, by Vivian Madison Mahoney, LMT, about the health care system in the U.S. If I may, I wish to share my thoughts about my life as a massage therapist practicing in the state of Michigan for 11 years.

Michigan currently does not regulate massage therapy. Many early massage regulations were enacted to prevent massage practitioners from diagnosing and treating illness with massage. State licensed medical professionals pushed these laws through.

During the 1960s - 1980s, massage regulations were changed to "tax" the growing adult entertainment massage industry. These laws were challenged and found unconstitutional by the courts in the mid 1980s. As a result, many municipalities, cities, villages and townships were forced to deal with regulating the "massage parlors" and protecting public safety.

The city I live in banned the practice of any and all forms of massage. Massage, as stated in the city ordinance, had no medical or social value and only brought down local property values. So in the minds of the city officials, our profession was banned to protect the public!

Many of us didn't think this position was fair or tenable. We proved that education mattered. We have continued with our education after graduating from state-licensed schools of massage. We have become nationally certified in therapeutic massage & bodywork. We've worked with established medical professionals who believed in the efficacy of massage, and asked for their support in changing these laws.

We have joined the local chambers of commerce and have introduced massage professionals as caring responsible business people with a strong code of ethics. We have stood in front of local boards of zoning appeals and presented evidence and support for changing zoning ordinances to classify massage as an "other allied health profession." We have stood in front of city councils and helped to change restrictive ordinances.

Officials in our area have come to understand what massage professionals stand for and what we believe in. We continue working hard to enhance the image and standing of the massage therapy profession.

As a male massage therapist, I feel I'm more acceptable to the public being aligned within the medical massage model. The boost in new business because of acceptance by the local city officials has been tremendous.

Whether or not health insurance companies in Michigan will ever reimburse for therapeutic massage performed by a massage professional is anyone's guess.

We have been working hard to have massage therapists from around the state come to a consensus on any form of statewide regulation. A small minority is strongly in favor of regulation. An equally small minority is strongly opposed to regulation. Each side looks into their proverbial crystal ball and sees the end of therapeutic massage in Michigan if their respective position isn't embraced by the remaining therapists (the silent majority!)

I believe that we all are looking for the profession of massage therapy to continue to grow. We need to work together for the enhancement and betterment of our profession.

The massage professionals who paved the way and accomplished so much have entrusted us to continue the fight, united with the goal of enhancing the acceptance and reputation of our massage profession. I hope and pray we will continue to work together to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

*Steven S. Serra, NCTMB*

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I feel that Steven's words speak for many, if not all of us - not only in terms of the reputation and regulation of our profession, but also our acceptance by insurance companies as legitimate health care providers (for those of us who wish to participate in the medical model).

In my 15 years of practice, my clients' insurance problems were always as important to me as their medical conditions. I felt if I could assist them in winning their insurance battles when and if I could, that in itself would help their medical condition to some degree. They needed someone to care! Someone to understand what they were going through! Someone who didn't always consider money first! They needed to know that they had someone in their corner if needed. And they needed to know that I was not their doctor, lawyer, or consultant, but that I just plain cared!

What kept me going for all those years, and what propelled me to accept insurance cases, to take on insurance companies, and to help therapists with insurance issues, was the belief that we must fight for ourselves. This belief also kept me going when things were at their very worst.

If we don't fight for our rights, someone else will fight against our rights. If we want something, we have to go after it! We cannot always expect others to do it for us! We cannot take "no" for an answer until we have left no stone unturned! If you don't try, you will never know what you could have! You don't have to know it all to begin! As you give, you receive, especially "if you don't expect it back from the source you gave it to"! And if you don't relish a challenge, you are missing the fun of it all!

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Click [here](#) for more information about Vivian Madison-Mahoney, LMT.



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