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## **Industry Leaders Discuss Future of Massage**

By Editorial Staff

On Jan. 21, 2003, the Florida State Massage Therapy Association (FSMTA) convened a forum on the "Future of the Massage Therapy Profession and the Massage School Hour Issue." The forum took place immediately prior to the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) Council of Schools meeting at the Adams Mark Hotel in Clearwater Beach, Fla.

The forum enjoyed representation from numerous industry leaders, including the president, executive director and several board members of the FSMTA; the executive director and chair of the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA); the president and executive director of the AMTA, and the secretary of its Council of Schools (COS); the director of certification and several board members of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB); the president of Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP); a board member of the American Organization for Bodywork Therapies of Asia (AOBTA); leaders of several massage schools; and the editor of *Massage Today*.

The FSMTA organized this forum because of issues facing the state of Florida; however, the participants debated questions of immediate concern to all practitioners, schools, governing bodies and professional groups worldwide.

Questions discussed included:

1. How are the existing educational requirements established, and on what are they based?
  - a. The NCBTMB requirement is 500 hours.
  - b. The COMTA requirement is 600 hours.

- c. The COS and AMTA requirement is 500 hours.
- d. In the U.S. and Canada, requirements range from 250 to 3,000 hours.
- e. More than half of the states require 500 hours.
- f. Three quarters of the states require 500 to 600 hours.

2. Are we facing the need for a tiered credentialing in massage therapy and bodywork? Is it necessary to identify an entry-level credential (distinct from a specialty credential), to maintain the viability of the different career paths in massage therapy that range from relaxation to rehabilitation and private practice to spas to medical offices?

3. If so, who oversees this process?

Options:

- a. Unibody: The government licenses both tiers (basic and specialty credentialing).
- b. Multibody: The government legislatively oversees the protection of the public through entry-level credentialing. In turn, the massage profession provides guidelines for advanced certifications through professional organizations or boards (peer certification along the lines of other professions that use this format, such as the medical profession).
- c. Other: In states without licensure, professional organizations are the only resource for practitioners who wish to be credentialed. The question still remains as to who sets the standards of acceptable and expectable behavior, both in general terms and for specific specialties. We are partially there already. The industry has established a well-accepted entry standard in the National Certification Exam (NCE), and many specialty groups and organizations have identified standards for their various modalities. The NCBTMB is currently developing an advanced-level credentialing test. Furthermore, 60 percent of state governments have some form of regulation.

4. What would the competencies be for each tier? Who would set these competencies?

5. What education is necessary to allow people to achieve these competencies?

6. What are the consequences of inaction?

Although this meeting did not provide definitive answers to any of these questions, it was a tremendous opportunity for industry leaders to gather in one room and discuss diverse viewpoints, in an effort to reach common ground. The respectful interaction evidenced at this forum is a good omen for the profession, if it can be maintained at future discussions.



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