

## **Massage Education Failing, Part V**

By Ralph Stephens, BS, LMT, NCTMB

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*Editor's note:* Parts I-IV of this article appeared in the March-June issues of *Massage Today*.

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In my previous four articles, I've discussed the failing educational system of our profession.

It is easy to find fault and moan about what's wrong. It is always more difficult to improve things. I am just a guy who writes a monthly column. I have no illusion that I have the answers to all the problems in massage education. My writing about it may not change anything. My real goal is to educate you about the extent of the problem and hopefully to stimulate an open discussion within the profession that will lead to positive change.

You can change things. Education must be dealt with at the state level. It will require concerned therapists, educators and schools who care about quality, to get together and come up with solutions that will work in their state. The laws and procedures in each state are different and must be dealt with individually. Ideally, there should be some consistency state to state. However, since there is no national leadership, you will have to do the best you can in your area. Do not attempt to organize all the schools or every educator. Only those with a true commitment for quality deserve your attention. Never attempt to reach a consensus of every school. Consensus is the absence of leadership.

It is the lowest common denominator process that prevents excellence. It is time to strive for excellence. It is time for leadership. It is time to do what is right. You who care must fight for what is right. Do not allow the K-Mart mentality of mediocrity or the whining of underachievers deter you from setting the highest practical standards possible. Set your goals and make your case to your regulatory boards and education departments. Most board members and legislators will side with an argument for excellence. It only takes a few dedicated individuals to change laws and rules.

Many of you have written asking how you can help, how you can join in, how you can improve things in massage education. This is how. Find other people in your state who care. Get together and write a proposal. Take it to your state licensing boards and legislators and departments of education. Then, stay in regular contact with them until action is taken.

Petitions may have to be circulated to show that many people, both professional and public, are concerned with your cause. Most people will sign a petition urging excellence and high standards. Only those involved in the substandard education will resist. They will not have the credibility or the evidence to win the debate.

In part four of this series, I made three suggestions to improve massage education. I suggested two years of college as a prerequisite for students entering massage/bodywork schools; three years of successful practice experience for instructors and one year for teaching assistants of massage/bodywork techniques; and thirdly, and requiring students to keep a daily diary of every hour of training they receive. I offer these suggestions as a place for those of you who care to start the debate.

This month, I have two more suggestions. My suggestions revolve around two organizations, COMTA and the Council of Schools. Whoa, look at the hands go up. Don't bother to write about my being a shill for the AMTA. I commend the AMTA when it does well, and knock it when it doesn't. Its sponsorship of these two organizations is good. COMTA had to be started by someone. No one else was willing to fund or tackle true accreditation for massage schools. It is a huge process to organize an accrediting agency. There needed to be an accreditation program for massage/bodywork programs. Finally there is one. (Refer to the June article.)

AMTA initially funded COMTA. Now, COMTA is administratively independent of AMTA, complete with its own elected board of directors. This is the same process that was used to start the national certification process. Right now, COMTA accredits massage/bodywork programs and the institutions that provide them. This makes the schools eligible to administer financial aid programs for students. The other accreditation agencies only accredit the institution. This is why so many accredited schools have such lousy programs. They run their businesses well and pass institutional accreditation. This is easy for community colleges and established trade schools, which explains why many of them get by with poor-quality massage programs; only the business is accredited. (Of course, there is also the phoney-baloney mail-order accreditation from the psuedo-association that accredits nothing, but looks like it does. This disgrace to education and our profession needs to be outlawed. It is consumer fraud.)

To require small schools to go through a legitimate accreditation process would destroy them. Many large schools do not go through the process because they do not want to deal with financial aid programs, anyway. Schools must increase revenue by at least \$36,000 just to cover the costs of administrating financial aid. However, if there was pressure from the profession, COMTA could create program accreditation, which would not involve the expense of being approved for and administering financial aid. This needs to be done. Once accomplished, all schools should have to become program accredited within three years of opening.

The other suggestion is a sort of school mentoring program. The best organization now in place is the Council of Schools. Yes, it is sponsored by AMTA -- Get over it. It is also an administratively independent organization. While good schools are not going to mentor their competition, nor should they, an organization like the Council of Schools allows schools to network, receive instructor training, work to create educational standards and hopefully raise the level of education in the profession. While membership cannot and should not be required, it needs to be made politically correct to belong. (PC needs to be good for something. Maybe this will finally be it!)

It is time to march forward. The problem is clear. Entry-level education for the massage/bodywork profession is failing and must be improved. I've proposed a few solutions - come up with more of your own, hopefully better ones than what I've presented. A mechanism to accomplish change has been outlined. It is up to you, to all of us who care, to act. The longest journey is initiated with the first step. It is up to you who care to take the first step. Go now! May your efforts benefit suffering humanity!

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