

Massage Therapy Benefits and Practice by Kimberly L. Bowling, LMT

National Massage Therapy Awareness Week is being celebrated October 21-27, and I wanted to take the opportunity to share some information about the benefits of Therapeutic Massage, and the current and future direction of the profession. Few professions are as misunderstood by the general public as massage therapy, and one of my professional goals is to combat that, by spreading accurate information and talking with people about massage therapy.

The therapeutic benefits of massage continue to be researched and studied. Recent research has shown the effectiveness of massage for the following conditions:

- Cancer-related fatigue
- Low back pain
- Osteoarthritis of the knee
- Reducing post-operative pain
- Boosting the body's immune system functioning
- Decreasing the symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome
- Lowering blood pressure
- Reducing headache frequency
- Easing alcohol withdrawal symptoms
- Decreasing pain in cancer patients.

The use of massage for health-related purposes, rather than just for relaxation, is increasing. According to a recent survey by the American Massage Therapy Association, 44% of adult Americans who had a massage in 2010-2011 received it for medical or health reasons, compared to 35% the previous year. Of the people who had at least one massage in the last five years, 40 percent reported they did so for health conditions such as pain management, injury rehabilitation, migraine control, or overall wellness. Nearly 90% percent agree that massage can be effective in reducing pain.

Currently, 43 states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapists or provide voluntary state certification. Indiana is one of those states – to practice massage therapy in Indiana, therapists must be licensed by the State Board of Massage Therapy. To be licensed in Indiana, massage therapists must meet the legal requirements to practice, which include a minimum of 500 hours of supervised, hands-on initial training and passing a difficult and comprehensive exam provided by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork. In addition, massage therapists must carry professional liability insurance.

Massage Therapists can also pursue NATIONAL certification. The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) is an independent, private, nonprofit organization that was founded in 1992 to establish a certification program and uphold a national standard of excellence. Today, there are

nearly 90,000 nationally certified massage therapists and bodyworkers safely and competently serving millions of Americans each year.

To become nationally certified, a massage therapist must demonstrate mastery of core skills and knowledge, pass an exam, uphold the standards of practice and code of ethics of the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork and take part in continuing education.

Beginning in the first quarter of 2013, the NCBTMB will launch a board certification credential. This credential will require passing of the Board Certification exam, 750 hours of education, 250 hours of hands on work experience and passing of a background check. By introducing this new, even tougher certification standard, the NCBTMB will support the career development and professional expertise of therapists interested in maximizing their professional development and capability.

I am proud to be able to say I am licensed in the State of Indiana to practice massage therapy, and nationally certified by the NCBTMB. I'm also looking forward to becoming Board Certified next year. I'm a graduate of the Arizona School of Massage Therapy's 800-hour Professional Massage Therapy Program. In addition, I have completed advanced training in geriatric massage and massage for patients with fibromyalgia, and I will soon be completing advanced training on assessment and treatment of neck injuries.

Look again at the list of potential health benefits of massage therapy demonstrated by recent research. Do any of these seem to describe you or your loved ones? I encourage you to give me a call at 812-709-9050 – I would be happy to answer any questions you might have about massage therapy, and to discuss how you might incorporate massage therapy as one part of your total wellness plan.

Lastly, did you know? Massage Therapy is often a reimbursable expense under your Health Savings Account (HSA) or similar plans, if you have one. Massage for relaxation is not reimbursable, but massage to treat a specific illness or condition is usually reimbursable. To be certain your specific situation qualifies, you should get a Letter of Medical Necessity from your health care provider (medical doctor or chiropractor).

--- Kimberly Bowling, LMT, NCTMB