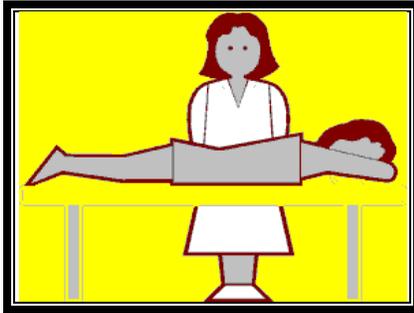


A Massage Therapist



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What exactly is massage therapy, and what type of duties do you have?

Massage therapy is a profession in which we use manual soft tissue manipulation (aka massage) in conjunction with other therapies including stretching, exercise, heat, cold, stress relief techniques, and diet manipulation to positively affect the client's health and well-being. The idea is to connect the mind, body and spirit, thereby creating an environment that allows the patient to heal themselves.

What types of patients do you see? What are the most common complaints you treat?

Basically anyone in pain or under a lot of stress can benefit from massage therapy. I have treated infants, children, young adults, and even senior citizens. Most of my clients come to me to be treated for lower back pain, neck and shoulder pain. Some of the problems are accident related and others are stress related. I have also treated people suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome, poor posture, high and low blood pressure, and sciatica.

What techniques do you use on your patients?

There are many types of massage therapy, each with their own techniques. I personally practice two therapies: connective tissue therapy and Swedish massage. The connective tissue therapy uses massage to release toxins stored in the tissue, making the body more fluid. The Swedish massage is a very gentle technique used to relax the body.

What types of businesses employ licensed massage therapists?

I am self employed. I have contracts through chiropractic offices, clinics, salons, and I have even made house calls. Some MT'S can be employed by hospitals and alternative health centers, and some have a private practice.

What type of education is required to practice in this field?

West Virginia law requires at least 500 hours of class time before you can become licensed. The program usually lasts about six months and it can be pretty grueling at times. You have to learn

anatomy, physiology, pathology, kinesiology and sensitivity training amongst other things. Other than learning about the body, you learn a lot about people.

What type of part-time or volunteer work would you suggest for someone pursuing licensure?

Alternative health businesses, health food stores, salons, and any field where you work with the public. By getting to know and work with the public, you will be in a better position to network later and market your services after gaining licensure. Also, medical offices are good places to learn about the medical field, professionalism and insurance billing.

What opportunities for higher learning or advancement are available to an LMT after licensure?

You can go on to learn advanced techniques like: hot rock therapy which uses heat and pressure from hot water and stones to treat patients; polarity therapy which deals with energy fields; acupressure (aka shiatsu) which is similar to acupuncture, and light touch therapy which uses minimal pressure to stimulate muscles.

What do you enjoy most about your profession?

It is a very rewarding field for one's spirit. I am able to relieve chronic pain when doctors and medication cannot. It is very empowering for myself to know that I can change the outlook and well being of a client in one session. I have a sense of doing good and making a difference in peoples' lives. Also, having your my business allows for a lot of flexibility in my schedule and free time to indulge in other interests.

What do you enjoy least about your profession?

I don't like working on people with poor hygiene habits or those who are inappropriate with their comments or actions. There are still a lot of people out there who are not well educated about massage therapy. In our culture people have a certain touch boundary that is broken only in intimate situations. We as MT's do breach this boundary. Massage therapy is sensual NOT sexual in nature. This is a concept that some people have a hard time grasping.

Are there any other drawbacks?

Yes there are. You represent your business and therefore must always advertise and sell your abilities to everyone you meet. Also, it is a very fickle business. One week you may see fifteen or twenty people and the next week you may only see one. Then there are those people who call and schedule and don't show up. Furthermore, you have to stay up on your paperwork for tax purposes. There are no benefits, retirement programs or insurance programs unless you get them on your own and this cuts into your profits.

Where can someone find out more about massage therapy as a career?

You can contact Mountain State School of Massage in Charleston or call the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA).

Interviewed by Sarah Boggess for a College 101 assignment on 12/00.