Teaching the Reflective Massage Therapist: How to Teach Research Literacy in the Classroom

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- Massage Therapy Canada Magazine
- AMTA Foundation

National Context:

- Natural Health Products Directorate, Health Canada
  As Canadians continue to demonstrate a strong interest in integrating complementary and alternative health care (CAHC) with conventional Western medicine [1], there is an increasing need for evidence on the safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness of complementary and alternative therapies and natural health products. While there is an understandable expectation that this evidence will be largely generated within the CAHC sector, progress in this area has been hindered by an overall lack of research literacy and capacity.


Workshop Learning Objectives

- Define reflective massage therapist, research literacy, research capacity and evidence-based practice
- Demonstrate awareness of the value of developing and integrating research literacy curricula in massage therapy schools
- Use self-reflection to identify the strengths and challenges in your organization’s capacity to develop and integrate research literacy into the curriculum

Context …

- CMTA – Needs Assessment Research Literacy
- HRSD (OLT), CMTA, Centennial College: Research Literacy for CAHC Practitioners: An Online Course
- AMTA Foundation – AMTA Massage Therapy Research Literacy Curriculum Kit
Learning Objectives …

- Identify resources for research literacy and capacity building, including Centennial College - THER 705: Research Literacy for CAHC Practitioners; An Online Course (ongoing education), www.centennialcollege.ca, AMTA Massage Therapy Research Curriculum Kit, www.amtafoundation.org, IN-CAM Research network: www.incamresearch.ca
- Problem solve next steps in the use of personal leadership to integrate research literacy and capacity in your school
- Apply cooperative learning strategies in the learning environment

What is the Reflective Massage Therapist?

- The reflective massage therapist continuously examines and develops their knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout their professional careers
- The reflective massage therapist seeks out new information from a variety of sources that will confirm, modify or alter their professional practice

Defining Research Literacy & Research Capacity

- Research Literacy is the ability to locate, understand, and critically evaluate research evidence for application in professional practice
- Research Capacity is the ability to design and conduct research


Defining Evidence-Based Practice

- "...the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient [client] values."


Evidence-Based Practice

Why Does Research Matter?

- Research is a fundamental aspect of all health care disciplines
- It supports the theoretical foundation of a discipline
- Research helps distinguish useful and safe practices from useless and unsafe practices that might be harmful to patients
- Research supports the use of massage therapy by the public

Why Does Research Literacy Matter? (cont’d)

- It facilitates our ability to communicate with other health care professionals through a shared language
- It encourages us to be critical thinkers
- Research literacy assists us in providing the best possible care for our clients
- It helps us to stay current and to be life-long reflective learners
- It helps us become better consumers of health care resources when we are clients ourselves


Four Basic Competencies in Research Literacy

- Ability to **find** the evidence for practice
- Ability to **understand** the evidence for practice
- Ability to **critically appraise** the evidence for practice
- Ability to **apply** the evidence for practice

Asking Questions – Teaching the Reflective Massage Therapist

- Introduces research and critical appraisal in the Complementary and Alternative Health Care (CAHC) research literature with a special emphasis on massage therapy research
- Focuses on why we need to ask questions about our work and how to construct good clinical questions

Finding the Evidence – Teaching the Inquiring Massage Therapist

- Introduces finding relevant massage therapy research in a variety of media including popular print and libraries
- Develops digital literacy skills, including the effective use of search engines and how to access and use key databases

Understanding the Evidence: Teaching the Thoughtful Massage Therapist

**Level I**
- Defines key components of research methodologies including quantitative and qualitative research design

**Level II**
- Defines key parametric and non-parametric statistical tests

Evaluating the Evidence: Teaching the Discerning Massage Therapist

**Level I**
- Identifies the underlying assumptions, limitations, and strengths of a variety of research methodologies including case studies

**Level II**
- Outlines how to create case studies
Applying the Evidence to Practice: Teaching the Creative Massage Therapist

**Level I**
- Identifies specific areas in massage therapy practice to alter or confirm from an evidence-based perspective
- Discusses how to communicate research information to clients and colleagues

**Level II**
- Outlines how to participate in research studies

Teaching Strategies

Cooperative Learning
- Think Pair Share
- 1 Minute Paper
- No Marks Quiz
- Placemat
- Gallery Walk
- Door Pass

Getting Started – the Challenges for Massage Therapy Schools

- Time
- Money
- Finding space in the curriculum
- Finding useful resources
- Teacher training

What is Needed …

- Institutional commitment to research, both philosophically and financially
- Institutional capacity to build partnerships with individuals and institutions that have well-developed research skills/programs, and to access appropriate private and public funding sources
- Professional development for faculty
- Faculty and student access to computers and internet resources
- Good in-house and/or local access to library services

What is needed …

- Designated academic curriculum in internet and print research skills, research history, methodology and ethics, and in critical thinking
- Designated clinical curriculum in conducting ethical, evidence-based quantitative and qualitative research
- Faculty and student access to client cohort groups through student clinics and/or community outreach programs
- Integration of critical thinking and research skills throughout the program

Integrating Research Curriculum

Intake/Admissions – Pre-requisites

- Assessing skills – digital literacy, critical thinking?
- Digital literacy skills training?
- Access to computers and the Internet?
- Access to libraries and databases?
- Sources of grants/funds for the development of technology in the workplace or educational institutions?
Faculty Attitudes & Training

- Students and the institution benefit most when faculty can critically assess the evidence for what they are teaching.
- Long-held assumptions about massage therapy may be unsupportable in light of developing information.
- Faculty members need encouragement to challenge massage theory myths and thoughtfully propose new ideas and explanations.
- It works best if they feel supported institutionally to create a learning environment where the answers are not always known and the benefits of massage in various situations are open to question.

Knowledge Discovery Vs. Knowledge Dissemination

- Teachers may need assistance in increasing their comfort level in the more chaotic learning environment of knowledge discovery versus knowledge dissemination.
- Teacher training: digital literacy, use of the Internet, critical appraisal, research capacity, cooperative learning strategies.
- Find good textbooks and Internet resources and sharing them.

Changing Faculty Attitudes to An Evidence-Based Approach

Stand Alone Courses

- Students need a basic course in accessing information through the Internet – How to Use PubMed and other databases and how to do an effective Google search using search limiters (in as little as 2-3 hours of class time).
- Students also need a basic course on the history and methodology of scientific inquiry (Trends and Issues course).

Creating a “Trends and Issues” Course

- Guest speakers with diverse research interests are brought in to make presentations.
- As part of the course requirement, students form teams of four or five to work on a project in which they review the current evidence on a topic of interest to them, for example sports massage for the elite athlete, massage therapy efficacy for clients with fibromyalgia, the effects of infant massage, or the current level of CAM integration in traditional health care settings.
- Students critique each other’s work following oral presentations.

Integrating Critical Thinking and Research Skills in all Courses

- Break down the barriers between theory and practice – make hydro and anatomy and physiology more evidence-based.
- Students should review CAM research and learn to situate this information into larger perspectives.
- Students learn that what constitutes evidence often depends upon who is asking the questions.
- Use pictures/diagrams and research information from the Internet to support/refute class debates and augment student assignments.
- Insist on accurate referencing of Internet sources.
Using Student Clinic and Outreach

**Putting Theory Into Practice**
- Teach students to write and present case reports
- Consider publishing the best case reports
- Develop “Grand Rounds”
- Design a basic research study in which all students participate
- Partner with a university or college to design and conduct a study
- Go after funding for research
- Support the dissemination of research information
- Attend conferences
- Support a teacher to do graduate work

As A Leader - Cultivate a Culture of Life-long Learning in Your School …

The Creative Leader takes the time to:
- Reflect
- Formulate thoughtful questions
- Read critically
- Discuss and learn with others
- Confirm, alter or modify practice
- Continuously learn and self-evaluate

Integrating Evidence-based Practice and Intuition: The Science and Art of Practice

- Applying best evidence is one set of threads in the complex tapestry of professional practice – let it help guide all decision-making process
- Intuition, gut hunches, preferences, cultural sensitivity and old fashioned experience can never be left out of the decision-making process
- Professional practice is always a science and an art

Critical Thinking, Intuition and the Construction of Knowledge

- Acquiring research literacy means committing ourselves as leaders and teachers to examining our own assumptions, biases, and knowledge base.
- We need to recognize that much of what we teach students today may be proven ineffective down the road.
- All knowledge is historically based and therefore limited by the social context in which it takes place.
- Good leaders and teachers encourage students to challenge conventional wisdom and think for themselves.

Critical Thinking (cont’d) …

Teaching research literacy and evidence-based practice is not about teaching students a specific set of skills for satisfying the requirements of one course.

- It is about integrating critical thinking into all aspects of our programs, including student clinic, treatment and clinical theory classes, and anatomy and physiology.
- It is about giving students more of the tools they need to access, evaluate, and construct knowledge in all its forms.

Critical Thinking (cont’d) …

- Massage therapy is known for its integration of body, mind, and spirit.
- If we integrate critical thinking into all our classes, do we begin to undermine the importance of our students’ ability to feel and use their intuition?
- Thinking and feeling (subtly shifting to the foreground and background of these different modes of perception) in attunement with the unique needs and preferences of clients is both the art and science of massage therapy. One enhances the other.
Critical Thinking (cont’d) …

Many brilliant and creative solutions arise from hunches, intuition, and feeling states.

Research literacy is best practiced when we develop our capacity to think critically, to feel, and to follow our intuition at the same time.

Making Sense of Research: A Guide to Research Literacy for Complementary Practitioners
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Massage Therapy Research Curriculum Kit to be Published by January 1, 2004

The AMTA Foundation has developed the Massage Therapy Research Curriculum Kit with the help of authors Trish Dryden, M.Ed., RMT and Rona Achilles, Ph.D. The Research Curriculum Kit was developed in order to support massage and bodywork schools in their efforts to enhance the quality and credibility of their programs and to push research to the forefront in the training of massage therapy professionals.


Evidence-Based Medicine – David Sackett (2000)
May the work of your hands
    Be a sign of gratitude
    And reverence
    For the human condition

Mahatma Gandhi