

ETHICS

ONE

By

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Table of Contents

1	What Are Ethics?	6
2	Quality of Care	9
3	Qualifications	13
4	Accurately Inform	17
5	Limitations	20
6	Improvement	24
7	Honesty and Respect	27
8	No Discrimination	30
9	Confidentiality	33
10	Consent	36
11	Client's Right to Refuse	39
12	Draping	41
13	Therapist's Right to Refuse	46
14	No Sexual Conduct	48
15	Conflict of Interest	51
16	Boundaries	53
17	Gifts	59
18	National Policies	61
19	Transference	63
20	Multidimensional Relationships	64
21	Sobriety	70
22	The Final Chapter	72
	Bibliography	73

Chapter 1:

What Are Ethics?

OK, you have to take an ethics course. So what are ethics? The dictionary says ethics are “The rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession.”¹

Ethics are generally divided into three parts: metaethics (Where did ethics come from? What does it mean?), normative ethics (establishing right and wrong conduct) and applied ethics (examining controversial issues.)²

Where do ethics come from? That’s *metaethics*. People were discussing principles of correct behavior early in human history. In Greece, Hesiod wrote in the 700s BCE that you get back what you put out.³ Three centuries later the philosopher Aristotle wrote two treatises called *Ethics*, arguing that human well-being fostered by the virtues are the basis for ethical behavior.⁴

Besides writing about ethics, the Greeks were big on massage—Homer wrote about massage oil and athletes were massaged before the Olympic games.⁵

Massage ethics in the United States date at least from 1943 when the American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses (later the American Massage Therapy Association) was formed in Chicago and adopted a pledge embracing “ethical practice” (dues were fifty cents).⁶ This organization established a code of ethics in 1960.⁷

The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB) began in 1992.⁸

Most of this class will be about *normative ethics*, discussing right and wrong conduct in the professional practice of massage. The basis for this discussion will be the NCBTMB's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

The sources used to document this book have intentionally been taken almost entirely from the Internet. This was done so that if a particular subject interests a reader, the reader can refer to the footnote and find a web site with more information to pursue.

The discussion of ethics does not end with this book. We would be delighted to hear from you on how you respond to these issues. Are there examples of how ethics play out in your practice? Please e-mail us at go@apollo123.com. Let us know if we can use your message in future editions and whether we can credit you by name.

Chapter Summary

Ethics are “a set of principles of right conduct.”

Massage ethics in the United States date from at least 1943.

Chapter 2:

“Have a sincere commitment to provide the highest quality of care to those that seek their professional services.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

According to legend, Lao Tzu was departing China when he was stopped by a border guard at the Han-Ku pass. The guard wanted Lao Tzu to leave a record of his philosophy for the benefit of others.

At first Lao Tzu dismissed the idea. But the guard pleaded and Lao Tzu sat down and wrote eighty-one chapters. Then he got up, walked away, and was never seen again.⁹ These chapters are called the Tao Te Ching or the *Simple Way*.

One of his sayings was that “A journey of a thousand miles begins at the spot under one's feet.”¹⁰ Sound familiar?

His point was that everything we do and everything we believe, contributes to future outcome. We can trace or present situation to a lifetime of decisions. Knowing this we have to weight our actions and our attitudes, deciding if they will benefit us in the long run.

The NCBTMB code does this at the start by having the therapist acknowledge a goal or promise to provide the best possible professional service.

The positive thinking industry says having a goal is the first step to everything else and that knowing where you're going is

critical. Too many detours and we find ourselves ending up in a completely different place.

Positive thinking gurus recommend writing your goals down and keeping a journal.¹¹ While you might not have time to journal, basing each of your decisions with an eye on long term outcomes is powerful in landing you where you want to be.

C.S. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, a story about three children and a lion named Aslan in the magical kingdom of Narnia. Aslan tells the children they will forget their goal but that he will provide signs or symbols to appear which will cause them to recall.

This first ethic serves the same role as Aslan's signs. Ethics is the sign post that reminds the therapist what the profession is about and promotes the reputation of the industry.

Having a sincere commitment also makes good business sense. Earl Nightingale used to tell the story of a store at the end of the San Francisco trolley line. The passengers had to disembark and wait while the trolley turned around.

In front of all these tourists the store had a sign in the window, "No Restrooms for Trolley Passengers / No Change for the Trolley." Here's a guy, Nightingale said, we need to help out as quickly as possible. Potential customers loitering right outside his door and he was turning them away.

Discouraging business is not a commitment to provide the best possible professional service. Had the store owner provided the restroom, the trolley passengers would have had to walk past his wares to get there. They would have been inside where they

could purchase something, instead of outside where they could not. In fact, if they're tourists they will need hats, maps, pocket books, sweatshirts and sun glasses. Making it easy for the customer to buy what will actually serve them well is part of providing the best professional service.

Providing a clean establishment with an atmosphere of soothing comfort and having a sincere commitment to the well-being of your clients—even though it requires vigilance—meets this ethic and makes excellent business sense as well.

Sincerity creates success. Generally the best massage therapists are those that are sincere about their work and are truly interested in their clients. There are not many success stories where a person got away with shoddy work except in the case where they had no competitors or they were an ancillary service.

The quality of service reflects not only on the person performing the service, but also on their profession. This is especially true of the massage industry where substandard work by a small fraction can reflect poorly on everyone.

If a client thinks ill of the industry or a particular establishment, often their evaluation was made on one initial encounter.

Everyone knows that if you get a bad haircut you just find another hair dresser. It could be in the same shop or another establishment, but it will happen. However, when someone receives a bad massage, they generally think the “place” gives a bad massage. Therefore, if a client has an unfortunate experience with a single therapist, all the other therapists at that location may never get an opportunity to cultivate that client. Especially

since the client will be faced with having to make it clear, he or she does not want the same therapist again. There might be ways around that but still it's awkward.

Coming away from one bad experience, a person may postpone getting massages in general because they conclude it isn't worth the expense. Or they may never get another massage because the ones they had were not impressive. In fact, it is common for massage therapists to stop getting massages after they've been in the business a number of years, for the say reason.

Focusing on the ideal was recommended by the fabulously wealthy Andrew Carnegie. "Concentrate: put all your eggs in one basket, and watch that basket," he said.¹²

Concentrating on the quality of your practice is key in determining your economic freedom and well being. Some think that they will be in the massage profession short term. However, that may not happen.

Chapter Summary

- Ethics is the sign post that reminds the therapist what the profession is about.
- Sincerity creates success.

Chapter 3:

“Represent their qualifications honestly, including education and professional affiliations, and provide only those services which they are qualified to perform.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“honestly represent all professional qualifications and affiliations”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice IV e

It's always a good idea to have the required government license to practice massage or bodywork. In New York in 2003 an undercover officer discovered a massage practitioner was allegedly not licensed; the therapist was charged with a felony of practicing without a license.¹³ Ordinarily, you would think massaging without a license is a misdemeanor not a felony but it depends on how the law is written in that jurisdiction.

A felony on someone's record can affect their ability to license in many professions... become employed in certain industries, run for political office, vote, or receive government assistance. A misdemeanor massaging without a license in some jurisdictions will result in that jurisdiction refusing to license the offender ever.

Many years ago there was a man calling himself a doctor. Several times a year he would get a group of therapists together and take them on a cruise. At the end of this voyage, he would

issue each of them a certificate which stated they were doctors of nutrition based on this *five day* trip.

Today there are still those who claim to be doctors of nutrition, graduates from this doctor's "school." Sometimes they speak at city council meetings. When they do, they run the risk of someone exposing them in public. Such dishonesty is completely unnecessary and very dangerous. If the client relies on a misapprehension that the therapist is a medical doctor or psychiatrist and something goes wrong, the therapist is liable to suit and might also face criminal charges for practicing medicine without a license.

The quality of a massage therapist's work is what attracts business and keeps it. Statements about qualifications won't take the place of simply giving a good massage.

If a person wants to claim a professional affiliation, then they should do what is necessary to become a member of that organization, whether it is getting further education or taking an exam. Otherwise everyone would make unwarranted claims and affiliations would be useless. Not to mention running the risk of being found out.

There is usually a good reason why these organizations have requirements. It is not just about the associations' levels of standards. Certain organizations can lend credence to its members, such as national certification.

Before attending any school, call the state to make sure the school is approved or registered. Check with the institution, organization or agency requiring the education to be certain the school is accepted by them. Don't rely on a school to give you this

information. People have been known to spend a great deal of time and money on massage education, only to later learn their school was not approved.

A court reporter, who had formerly been a legal clerk while in the Army, set up a web site which contained the words “Free legal advice.” The proprietor suggested many legal problems could be handled without lawyers and offered to consult with people having legal problems.

A complaint was filed with the Ohio Board of Commissioners on the Unauthorized Practice of the Law. Because the Board could not find any evidence the web site had offered advice to a specific person, the court reporter escaped punishment. But this is an example in another profession of someone providing services he was not qualified to perform.¹⁴

What are the issues? The court reporter might argue he could offer good legal advice at a lower price than those high-priced attorneys. He might be more accessible to clients, offering to give advice via e-mail or in a chat room, venues a traditional attorney may spurn. The attorney’s board would probably suggest that the public is protected by licensing attorneys, that persons who have not gone through law school might miss some of the intricacies of, or possible solutions to a problem.

Certification tells the client the provider is dedicated and has advanced knowledge in their profession. However, this expertise, valuable as it is, should not be mistaken for abilities in other fields. For example, a massage therapist should not wander into the practice of chiropractic (in many states, therapists cannot perform chiropractic adjustments) (unless separately licensed for that field).

Chapter Summary

- The quality of a therapist's work is what attracts business and keeps it there.
- If a therapist wants to claim a professional affiliation, then he or she should do what is necessary to become a member of that organization

Chapter 4:

“Accurately inform clients, other health care practitioners, and the public of the scope and limitations of their discipline.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“be knowledgeable of his/her scope of practice and practice only within these limitations.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I I

“accurately and truthfully inform the public of services provided.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice IV d

According to a recent survey published by the American Massage Therapy Association, “60 percent of consumers seek massage for health and medical reasons, and only six percent for sheer indulgence.”¹⁵

Clients may have all types of expectations. Some of which might be unrealistic if you are not a physical therapist, chiropractor or doctor.

If the client is looking for diagnosis or something beyond the scope of massage, the nature of what can be offered has to be made clear. In some case, it may become necessary to point out that you are not affiliated with any other professionals.

Particular jurisdictions (cities, counties or states) may have specific definitions which limit the practice of massage. The school a therapist attends also defines the scope of practice, because some schools are qualified in areas that others are not. Ultimately, however, it will be up to the laws set by the agency that licenses you. One exception is if there was something at the federal level that said otherwise.

In some cases and jurisdictions, certain modalities may be outside the scope of the practice of massage. One might be available to provide these modalities in place of or in addition to the massage therapy (assuming all other licensing requirements were met). However, the Code of Ethics suggests the client should be informed the procedure is outside that of the massage certification, if that is the case.

This is one example of evaluating whether or not a particular practice might be within the scope. If the client is relying on certification as a guarantee of expertise, the therapist should be careful the "color of authority" of certification does not embrace other practices.

In California, an esthetician can do facials. A massage therapist can do facial massages—but not facials. A therapist in this situation would have to make clear what is being offered is not a facial (unless the therapist is also an esthetician.) The facial massage and the facial may be very similar. However, a facial is more invasive.

Post your certifications. The therapist should not let anyone assume that he or she has qualifications which are really non-existent.

In a clinical setting a massage therapist may be part of a team, working with others from different disciplines. This ethic advises massage therapists to be clear about the limitations of their practice if requested to perform outside of them.

Clients tend to assume a massage therapist has more knowledge than they actually do. They often ask for a diagnosis of something that is bothering them. It would be best to let them know you're not qualified to answer. It is always comforting to a client, however, if you ask them to let you know what their doctor says about it.

Oftentimes therapists rent space in the office of a chiropractor or adjacent to one in a medical building. In this situation, they are required to make it obvious that they are not affiliated with the chiropractor or surrounding medical offices and that they are an independent business.

It is more difficult to think of what the ethic has in mind when it talks of telling the public of "the scope and limitations of" massage. But if a misimpression arose in the public's mind, the therapist has the ethical duty to correct it.

Chapter Summary

- The therapist should not let anyone assume the therapist is something the therapist is not.

Chapter 5:

“Acknowledge the limitations of and contraindications for massage and bodywork and refer clients to appropriate health care professionals.”

“Provide treatment only where there is a reasonable expectation that it will be advantageous to the client.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“refer to other professionals when in the best interest of the client and/or practitioner”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I m

“Recognize his/her personal limitations and practice only within these limitations.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice V a

According to the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA), "Recent research shows that massage provides relief for chronic low back pain, eases pain and muscle spasms following bypass surgery, and is effective in treating lymphedema, a condition common among mastectomy survivors."¹⁶ Ninety-one percent of the respondents to a 2003 AMTA survey agreed massage can reduce pain.¹⁷

If someone is coming in for pain reduction or simple to enjoy a massage, the treatment is advantageous to the purchaser.

A situation where the massage could be harmful is called a contraindication.

For many years, cancer was a contraindication for massage.¹⁸ Now, however, with additional training for the therapist, it is thought that massage can be a valuable part of the program of treatment in conjunction with written authorization from the physician.¹⁹ The old fear that massage would cause the cancer to spread is now regarded as unlikely, though the mechanism for cancer growth is not completely understood.²⁰ There is even a book on the subject--Gayle MacDonald's *Medicine Hands: Massage Therapy for People with Cancer*.

Other conditions which may indicate massage is not appropriate include:

phlebitis	recent accident
nausea	diabetes ²¹
headache	fever
blood clot	under the influence of drugs
spinal injury epilepsy	under the influence of alcohol
heart trouble	neuritis
drug pump	thrombosis
implant	hypertension
fainting spells	oedema
arthritis, skin problem	osteoporosis
pacemaker	nervous condition
recent surgery	psychotic condition
low or high blood pressure	Bell's palsy
infectious disease	trapped or pinched nerves
back or neck injury	gynecological infections. ²²
dislocation	

It may be convenient to ascertain whether a client has any of these by requesting the completion of a preprinted health questionnaire. You can then determine whether massage will still be advantageous for the client with special care or precautions or whether they should be advised massage is not appropriate at that time.

There may be conditions which are contraindicated to a particular area which won't void the therapy. Thus the person can be massaged if the affected area is avoided. These could include varicose veins, undiagnosed lumps, bumps, pain or inflammation, pregnancy (though additional training may be required), bruising, cuts, abrasions and sunburn.²³

If the client has any condition which is being treated by a medical professional, such as a doctor, the massage therapist should defer to the other practitioner. He or she can of course proceed with written authorization from a medical practitioner.

Therapists are not doctors and not trained to diagnose. The discovery of contraindicating conditions will most likely come from disclosure by the client. However, it is the ethical responsibility to ask for the information and then to use it to evaluate whether the therapy will be good for the client. A negative determination may lead to the ethical obligation of recommending a health care provider in another discipline.

Chapter Summary

- A situation where the massage could be harmful is called a contraindication.

- It is the ethical responsibility of the therapist to ask for the information to discover contraindications and then to use it to evaluate whether the therapy will be advantageous for the client.

Chapter 6:

“Consistently maintain and improve professional knowledge and competence, striving for professional excellence through regular assessment of personal and professional strengths and weaknesses and through continued education training.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“What gets measured gets done,” wrote management guru Tom Peters.²⁴ His point was that everyone has great ideas but they’re most often buried in the drudgery of laundry, getting to work, dealing with clients, lunch, cleaning and staying on top of everything. But reaching higher is still important. Peters’ company aims for 10 improvements in each product or service every 90 days!²⁵

How could a therapist’s workplace be improved in ten ways over the next three months?

Peters looks at the areas of customers, suppliers, employees and leadership as places of change.²⁶ A therapist might choose differently. Perhaps learning one new massage skill or technique, increasing repeat customers by ten percent, and improving advertising effectiveness (possibly by exploring other advertising venues, such as the Internet) would be more reasonable choices.

Motivational experts say that writing these goals down and looking at the paper frequently helps achieve the goals. It is generally believed that few people have definite, written goals.

But having set goals, how are they achieved? Sure, a ten percent improvement in regular client's visits would be great but how is it done?

W. Clement Stone was born in poverty. He began his business career selling newspaper and ended up, very wealthy, with his own insurance empire.²⁷ One of the techniques he credits for his success is "creative thinking time," where he simply sat down and thought about his goals. This may be revolutionary; it is estimated that less than 15% of people engage in any original thinking.²⁸

Earl Nightingale details the process. He suggests taking a legal yellow pad, writing the goal at the top of the page and sitting for an hour a day each week day, thinking of ways in which one can improve service in one's job.²⁹ He suggests trying for twenty ideas a day. Even if one came up with 5 ideas a day and took two weeks completely off for vacation, it is still 1,250 new ideas a year. That's 312 new ideas every 90 days—and Peters only wants 10 improvements for each of his products or services every three months.

Of course, most of the ideas won't work. They will be something for the future or impractical. But 96% of them can be discarded and there will still be 10 improvements every 90 days.

Set up checkpoints—how are the goals coming? Were they achieved? Peters suggests at least 10 celebratory events a month to recognize any success—no matter how small.

Chapter Summary

- The therapist should consistently maintain and improve professional knowledge and competence.
- Set up checkpoints—how are the goals coming?

Chapter 7:

“Conduct their business and professional activities with honesty and integrity, and respect the inherent worth of all persons.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“conduct himself/herself in a manner in all settings meriting the respect of the public and other professionals”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I c

“treat each client with dignity and respect”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I d

“promote his/her business with integrity and avoid potential and actual conflicts of interest”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice IV f

“advertise in a manner that is honest, dignified, and representative of services that can be delivered and remains consistent with the NCBTMB Code of Ethics”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice IV g

Clients expect a protected environment. They trust their therapist will protect their modesty and safety. They won't be able to feel that way if the therapist is engaged in commercial shortchanging. Clients are not unaware. Trust has to be

established by the massage therapist from the beginning by making what they say and do a reflection of sincerity and sensitivity.

Be honest. Don't advertise what isn't being offered or which is available only with a hitch. If a free half hour massage is advertised, it should be free and not contingent upon the purchase of a package the client is not made aware of until they phone or show up.

If the client asks for your credentials, they should be communicated correctly.

Don't try to hype the impression given to the client. Avoid gimmicks or ploys. Have pricing plainly in sight.

Schemes in today's commercial world are common. Not since the time of the Great Depression, the age of the flimflam man, has there been so much deception in business. A free credit report advertised on the net can result in a six month fight to get a \$69 credit service off one's checking account. A computer center with an unprinted warranty may say only the hardware is protected—and then find every problem is caused by software. The therapist should not participate in that behavior or live in that world.

Avoid prejudging a client. They should all be treated with professionalism. A person who seems iffy may turn out to be your best client. The client is paying your bills, supporting your lifestyle. Be your real self with them and not inappropriate, over-familiar, or uppity.

There may be just and reasonable cause not to treat a particular client (see chapter 13) but even in advising the client of these circumstances, the inherent worth and dignity of the client should be respected.

The therapist may have encountered some prejudice because of the profession. Perhaps licensing at a police station caused one to feel like a second class citizen. It is important the client never get this impression from the therapist. As the Greek ethicist Hesiod said in chapter 1, you get back what you put out. Demonstrate a professional caring attitude to all clients and their thoughts have nowhere else to go.

Chapter Summary

- Do not advertise what is not being offered or which is available only with a hitch.
- The inherent worth and dignity of the client should be respected and accounted for.

Chapter 8:

"Refuse to unjustly discriminate against clients or other ethical health professionals."

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

"refrain from any behavior that results in illegal, discriminatory, or unethical actions."

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice II b

Don't turn away the person who is paying the bills. Don't hurt anyone's feelings--they are more aware than you think. You chose this industry--not everyone who walks through the door will be wonderful. But everyone represents humanity.

Find something good to say. Let them know they are valued. Their eyes will light up. This will make their day (perhaps even their week.) But be honest. A client can weigh 400 pounds yet have very nice skin. Say the good. Shape does not matter. There are all kinds of bodies. But the body is not the entire person. When the therapist acknowledges the full person, then the real relationship begins.

Clients may be protected by law against discrimination. The New York State Education Department, for example, says, "Massage therapists do not discriminate in providing services to patients/clients based upon culture, ethnicity, age, gender, belief, or sexual orientation."³⁰ The Office of Civil Rights of the federal Department of Health and Human Services held that the city of Los Angeles had to license an HIV-positive therapist.³¹ It is

probable some jurisdictions have applied the same protection to clients.

Disabled persons may be protected under state or federal law. Massage establishments may need to comply with the public accommodations portion of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Information is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm> or by calling 800-514-0301. The 1990 Act has engendered considerable litigation. Not even the state of Tennessee was immune. In 2004, the United States Supreme Court in a 5-4 decision ruled George Lane could sue the state of Tennessee for failing to provide an elevator in a courthouse. Mr. Lane appeared in court by crawling up the steps. On a second occasion, he refused to crawl again. Court employees indicated he refused their offers of assistance. He was subsequently arrested for failing to appear.³² Remodeling raises greater diligence issues but there is no grandfather clause--even existing buildings must comply to some extent.³³ Tenants are as responsible as landlords for conforming to the Act.³⁴

Do not put down other modalities of therapy. One client asked a technician not to press on an old back injury. The therapist said, "Oh, those doctors don't know what they're talking about. I can fix that." Without permission, she began doing hard manipulation. The client had to see his doctor and was in pain for several weeks. Not only did that massage therapist never see the client again but may have given the impression the industry is full of flakes.

Occasionally there is still tension between massage therapists and other health professionals. The gap is just beginning to be transcended. To continue coming together, therapists need to respect the medical profession. While

therapists may have their own opinions about health, it is better to use diplomacy.

Chapter Summary

- Clients may be protected by law against discrimination.
- Do not put down other modalities of therapy.

Chapter 9:

“Safeguard the confidentiality of all client information, unless disclosure is required by law, court order, or absolutely necessary for the protection of the public.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“protect the confidentiality of the client’s identity in social conversations, all advertisements, and any and all other matters unless disclosure of identifiable information is requested by the client in writing, is medically necessary, or is required by law.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice III a

“share pertinent information about the client with third parties when required by law.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice III d

The client has the right to expect confidentiality. The information received should be stored in a locked cabinet or passworded computer. Any completed forms or questionnaires should not be left on the front counter or in any other area accessible to the public. One should generally not discuss a client’s information or repeat a client’s conversation to others.³⁵

It is a common business practice to maintain a backup of computer files off site. If this is done in the therapist’s case, the back up site should have the same protections as the primary office.

The mailing of advertising from the therapist to an address (whether physical or e-mail) provided by the client is probably a violation of confidentiality unless they have signed permission allowing advertisements. The disclosure of the client's address to a third party for advertising is certainly a violation.³⁶

Therapists working in a practice with other massage therapists frequently discuss clients' foibles. Various therapists within the office may have access to the client's records including preferences and history. Presumably the Code of Ethics does not discourage this routine business practice.

Videotaping or making an audio recording of a client's session without the client's permission violates the client's expectation of privacy and may be violative of this ethic. Doing so may also be illegal in some jurisdictions (California is an example.)³⁷

In offices with multiple clients at the same time, the therapist may want to consider banning cell phones with camera ability to protect a client's confidentiality and privacy. Numerous businesses and government offices have done so.

If an inadvertent release of confidential information occurs, the therapist should do everything possible to correct the error.³⁸

Some persons are permitted or required by law not to disclose certain information under specific conditions. These people include attorneys, doctors, husbands and wives, priests, the president of the United States and reporters.³⁹ Massage therapists are not covered by these laws. A therapist employed by a doctor or acting pursuant to an attorney's instructions should

consult this employer to determine if and when the employer's privilege extends to the therapist.

A therapist may not be able to wait to be asked before being legally required to divulge otherwise confidential information. Some jurisdictions requires citizen to report information they discover regarding a crime (Indiana—child abuse).⁴⁰

The New York State Education Department says that any incident where the disclosure of confidential information is required should be noted in the therapist's records.⁴¹

Chapter Summary

- The client has the right to expect confidentiality.
- The therapist should generally not discuss a client's information or a client's conversation with others though an exception occurs when a therapist is required to do so by law.

Chapter 10

“Respect the client’s right to treatment with informed and voluntary consent. The NCBTMB practitioner will obtain and record the informed consent of the client, or client’s advocate, before providing treatment. This consent may be written or verbal.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“obtain voluntary and informed consent from the client prior to initiating the session.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I i

Self-employed therapists may feel consent is implied if the client walks through the door or calls for appointment. Even then, the therapist needs to negotiate price and therapy. One way to ask is to say, “Which treatment are you consenting to?” The client’s answer consents to the massage. Another way is to ask “Is there any area that is giving you trouble?”

If the therapist is employed by someone else (such as a doctor or chiropractor) and finds the client already in the room, consent as part of the introduction works nicely. If the therapist knows the area the doctor wants addressed, this can be described to the client and then “Is that OK with you?” can be asked to obtain consent. The client questionnaire form may also contain a consent line requiring client signature.

In the worst case, massaging a person without consent would be assault and battery. Assault is defined as “the crime or

tort of threatening or attempting to inflict immediate offensive physical contact or bodily harm that one has the present ability to inflict and that puts the victim in fear of such harm or contact.”⁴² Notice that assault does not require actual touching. Just the thought that one could be touched is enough. Obtaining consent will eliminate any misunderstanding.

Discussing the details of the whole massage will provide the opportunity for the client’s total consent. The author goes for facials. Beauticians consistently attempt to pluck her eyebrows during the facial—a procedure the author does not want. Making sure both parties know what is going to occur (full consent) obviates any problems.

The problem of consent may be particularly exacerbated where the therapist is male and the client is female. The therapist should take special pains to be aware of and respect her personal boundaries. A new therapist may feel excited to demonstrate skills. But doing so with an unwilling victim may make the recipient feel trespassed upon. Don’t insist on any treatment, technique or procedure. The first time the client says no, let it go. You can always discuss it with them afterward for the next visit. Discussing future treatment also encourages them to return.

One therapist, upon meeting a friend’s new boyfriend, was asked what she did for a living. She immediately jumped up and began massaging him to the embarrassment of all. Obtaining consent would have avoided this gaffe.

Language may prevent consent. America is becoming increasingly multicultural. In New York City, for example, more than 170 languages are spoken.⁴³ If the therapist cannot communicate in the client’s language, it is unlikely consent can be

achieved which might suggest the massage may need to be declined or some indication of consent other than language has to occur.

The point of this ethic is not to assume. The goal is to be caring. Guessing what a client wants is less than this. So just make sure the client has a thorough understanding.

This ethic requires that the therapist make a record of the consent, even if the client consented verbally.

Chapter Summary

- Discussing the details of the whole massage will provide the opportunity for the client's total consent.
- The point of this ethic is not to assume.

Chapter 11

“Respect the client’s right to refuse, modify, or terminate treatment regardless of prior consent given.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“respect the client’s right to refuse the therapeutic session.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice V g

Sometimes a client has a false notion of how the treatment is going to be. The therapist may be new to them and the client is unfamiliar with their technique. They may have an area that is bothersome and expect it to be addressed with special therapy. In any of these cases, the massage can’t take place until the situation is resolved.

If the client wants to have the massage modified, the therapist should be clear exactly what that modification will consist of. Get permission. For example, “Based on what you are telling me, this is how we can modify the treatment_____. Is that okay with you?”

The situation could become very bad if the therapist insisted on a particular treatment when the client has shown reluctance. It would be even worse if the therapist goes so far as to continue a massage once the client indicated they wanted it stopped...no matter how subtle they indicated it. Especially be aware that certain cultures refuse with more delicacy than others. One size does not fit all. People have their own level of comfort.

They have that right—it is their body. The nurturing environment in which massage should occur can't be maintained under any of these circumstances.

The client is paying for the massage and can leave if things don't go according to their expectations. They should not be encouraged to stay at that point. Listening to the client may leave the possibility of return open if the reason for the termination is unrelated to the therapy. If a therapist is bullheaded and coaxes the client into continuing, it is unlikely they will relax and they will probably bring it up again after 15 minutes anyway. Also the chances of the client returning are nil.

Everyone needs to be in charge of their own body. This NCBTMB ethic respects that.

The reason for the client's termination of the massage can't be assumed. They may not be comfortable giving the true reason for leaving. The departure may be completely unrelated to the therapist or their performance.

Stockbrokers have a term, "Know your exit." Smart investors have established a predetermined price for a stock at which they will sell rather than possibly follow it down. The client's indication of a desire to terminate the massage is the therapist's exit. Once the client makes this assertion, the therapist should end any contact and step back. Otherwise things could disintegrate rather rapidly. The therapist might say, "Absolutely. No problem." Any further discussion about it should be after the client is dressed and away from the immediate massage area.

Oftentimes the client has to be somewhere. If the client is paying attention to the time while getting a massage then it's the

wrong massage. But generally they are too relaxed to think about the time. Therefore, if the therapist is going over time, they should mention it. That way the client is not late for a commitment elsewhere. It never hurts to make it a habit to ask “Do you have to be somewhere after this.”

The refund policy of the establishment should be clearly posted so there is no question on this issue if a client requests termination of the session.

Chapter Summary

- The client is paying for the massage and can leave if things, to the client’s way of thinking, become uncomfortable.
- The therapist should not assume the reason for the client’s termination.
- Once the client makes this assertion, the therapist should end any touching and step back.

Chapter 12

“Provide draping and treatment in a way that ensures the safety, comfort and privacy of the client.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“use appropriate draping to protect the client’s physical and emotional privacy”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I k

The client puts trust in the therapist. Rarely in any other circumstance would anyone allow a person whom they hardly know, so much privilege. The client may be undressed on a massage table, or sitting in a chair with their back to the therapist. The therapist hovers over them and is allowed to manipulate their body. Whatever the therapeutic scenario, the client realizes they are in a vulnerable state. Proper draping goes a long way in enabling the client to overcome vulnerability and relax in this situation.

An improperly draped client may demonstrate discomfort by chattering. Placing a blanket over a chatterer and massaging one small uncovered part at a time will frequently end the stream of talk. The client feels the heaviness of the blanket and realizes the protection.

Many people are not all that comfortable with their bodies. They don’t think they’re beautiful. They are their worse critics. The more they are draped, the more relaxed they will be. Until

they get to know the therapist better, they may worry about being judged.

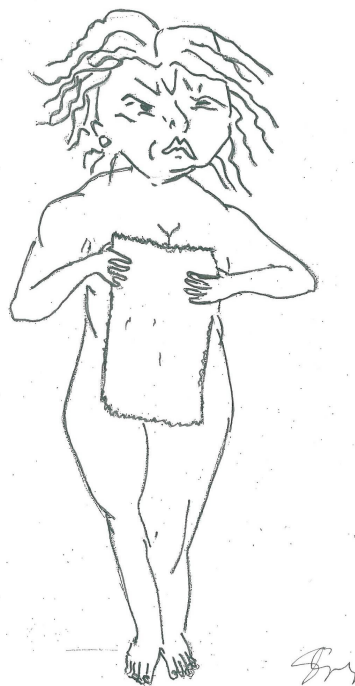
Male therapists working with female clients should be particularly diligent with this ethic. In the United States, it is common practice to drape the female clients' breasts. Any deviation should be authorized in writing for the therapist's own safety.

Some jurisdictions do not require draping but this ethic suggest that certified therapists will drape whether or not the law requires them to do so.

Schools teach proper draping methods. As therapists accumulate practice, they become comfortable with bodies and may become sloppy in their draping. This is an area where sticking to the rules will avoid problems.

There is a common scenario in movies. A male patient, embarrassed at having to expose himself to a female nurse, is greeted by the nurse with "You don't have anything I haven't seen before." This does not change how he feels, even in the film. Responses such as this are not appropriate. It does not insure the comfort of the client. Some clients are simply uncomfortable with their bodies. A more appropriate response to such a client might be to discuss a draping method that the client can be comfortable with.

Therapists working from medical instructions will ensure the safety of the client by strictly adhering to the limits of the doctor's orders.



“Provide draping and treatment in a way that ensures the safety, comfort and privacy of the client.”

Chapter Summary

- Proper draping goes a long way in enabling the client to overcome vulnerability and relax.

Chapter 13

“Exercise the right to refuse to treat any person or part of the body for just and reasonable cause.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“Have the right to refuse and/or terminate the service to a client who is abusive or under the influence of alcohol, drugs or any illegal substance.”

--NCBTMB Standards of Practice V i

Massage may be inadvisable because of contraindications (see Chapter 5).

A client may not be in a position at that moment for a massage. For example, they may be obnoxious, intoxicated or unable to pay. A person who is frightening or who is grubby and unclean may be refused.

The therapist may be working alone or in an area which is largely empty. Perhaps the establishment is located in an office complex where the offices close at six and the therapist's office is open till eight. It would be wise to exercise greater caution after six. It may be advisable to restrict the practice after a certain hour to only those well known clients.

The right to refuse service to anyone should be clearly posted in the lobby of the establishment where prospective clients can read it. This is a common business practice.

The therapist may be too tired to work on a particular client. The beauty of the industry is its traditionally relaxed atmosphere and lack of conventional deadlines. The therapist may have had prior experience with the client which proved incompatible. It may be appropriate to gracefully suggest another therapist.

Refusing to treat because of gender, national origin, ancestry, race, color, religion, creed, age, gender orientation or sexual orientation may be illegal.

Refusing to treat some parts of the body are mandated by the law or ethics (see the next chapter.) If the person has a condition and imagines massage may improve the situation, treatment should still be refused if massage would worsen the condition. The therapist may wish to refuse treatment of the affected body part in any case since the client may blame them for any subsequent worsening of the problem.

Therapists who are not trained in certain specialized forms of massage should decline treatment. For example, pregnancy massage requires training. Inappropriate massage on a pregnant woman in her later trimesters has been said to induce early labor. There is material available teaching anyone how to do chiropractic adjustments. One would be better off refusing to administer chiropractic adjustments unless properly trained and licensed to do so. Many massage licensing agencies have this as one of the rules.

Chapter Summary

- Massage may be inadvisable because of contraindications.
- The right to refuse service to anyone should be clearly posted in the lobby.

Chapter 14

“Refrain, under all circumstances, from initiating or engaging in any sexual conduct, sexual activities, or sexualizing behavior involving a client, even if the client attempts to sexualize the relationship.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“not engage in any sexual activity with a client”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice V e

“in the event the client initiates sexual behavior, clarify the purpose of the therapeutic session, and, if such conduct does not cease, terminate or refuse the session”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice VI b

This is one area where client consent is unavailing. If the client initiates sexual conversation, the therapist should take charge of the conversation and immediately change the subject. The therapist should not participate; should not open that door or permit that door to be opened. If the client continues with such conversation or behavior, the therapist should advise the massage will be terminated or simply terminate the massage and leave the room. The therapist is in charge of the massage... always.

This example was given by a massage therapist, referred to here as Sue. Sue had an established client with whom her conversations, while never sexual, had become slightly flirtatious. One evening Sue came upon the client as he stood in the lobby

speaking with another therapist. The other therapist had a strange look on her face. Sue soon realized the problem when she noticed some exposure on the client's part. Sue and the other therapist spent the next 2 hours barricaded in the sauna.

While this situation was caused by an extreme and unwarranted act on the part of a client, Sue feels that had she conducted herself professionally, the client may not have dared risk the misbehavior.

Certainly the client would not have behaved in such a manner if a nurse had flirted with him in a doctor's office or a waitress in a coffee shop. Others may argue a doctor's visit is different and you can only read so much into a cup of coffee and a Danish. However, the real problem is some people still have outdated misconceptions about massage, so a massage therapist is more vulnerable.

Male therapists treating female clients should exercise caution and pay great attention to the client's consent (chapter 10) to avoid any issues in this area.

Hair dressing is nonsexual; so is massage in a professional setting.⁴⁴ Some clients may need to be educated to appreciate the distinction. At first hint the therapist should let the client know they are a qualified professional and that is that. Also gossiping with clients about questionable massage establishments only casts doubt upon the industry and feeds rumors.

"Research and consumer surveys leave no doubt that massage is now thought of first and primarily as a legitimate, legal, and honorable profession," writes Linda Diane Feldt, past president of the American Polarity Therapy Association.⁴⁵ That

reputation can be burnished—or tarnished—by the actions of every practitioner. Lawyers did not become a joke because every lawyer was bad and rapacious but because a small percentage was dishonest and greedy. Every therapist represents not only that therapist's practice but also the industry.

Chapter Summary

- If the client initiates sexual conversation, the therapist should immediately change the subject or terminate the massage.
- The therapist is in charge of the massage always.

Chapter 15

“Avoid any interest, activity or influence which might be in conflict with the practitioner’s obligation to act in the best interests of the client or the profession.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

--“promote his/her business with integrity and avoid potential and actual conflicts of interest”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice IV f

Some clients may become addicted to massage. If the therapist suspects a frequent customer is enduring financial strain (the client’s occupation does not reflect monies being spent, for example), the therapist should limit the treatments to fit the client’s budget. The therapist can say "Let me make you an appointment for" some date farther away than the client's normal return date.

The therapist should be careful to use lotion or other products to which the client is not allergic. The selling of products, aside for providing the treatment, should be weighed. The products should be appropriate to the client. If there is the possibility the client may be interested simply in massage, then no other commerce should be initiated. There is nothing worse than a therapist who pushes products on a client when they aren’t into it. This may cost them the client as well. In fact, the Alberta Registered Massage Therapists Society has a proposed ethic which would seem to suggest the sale of products is unethical:

"refrain from using ... professional credentials to promote or discuss commercial products or services."⁴⁶

The therapist will generally treat information received from a client as confidential (see chapter 9). If the therapist knows a client is friends, with another client, the therapist should exercise especial diligence not to accidentally gossip or reveal any confidences. It is quite common for clients to be friends with each other or connected without the therapists knowing it.

In the relative intimacy of the therapist-client treatment, some clients may begin to feel an attraction for the therapist. While it is apparently possible to date a client, it is clear from the NCBTMB Standards of Practice that in order to engage in a sexual relationship with a client, the therapist must cease to see the client professionally and thereafter wait six months.

The Alberta Registered Massage Therapists Society had proposed ethics saying it was a conflict of interest for a massage therapist to use "position, authority or privileged information to Obtain an improper benefit personally, directly or indirectly, or Obtain an improper benefit for a friend, relative or associate."⁴⁷ Certainly coercing a benefit from a client by revealing the status of client or other confidential information is a conflict of interest.⁴⁸

Chapter Summary

- The therapist should act in the client's best interest.
- The selling of products besides providing massage should be reviewed

Chapter 16

“Respect the client’s boundaries with regard to privacy, disclosure, exposure, emotional expression, beliefs, and the client’s reasonable expectation of professional behavior. Practitioners will respect the client’s autonomy.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“Acknowledge and respect the client’s freedom of choice in the therapeutic session.”

--NCBTMB Standards of Practice V f

Even though a client may talk about his or her private life, the therapist should not pry. Don’t ask for more than the client is giving. They really just want someone to listen and it may be hard to find someone to listen in our disconnected society. There is not always an uncle or aunt to confide in. So an opportunity to voice their problems to someone may be rare. Sometimes simply hearing their own voice describing things will lead them to a solution. Getting problems off their chest will allow the client to relax and make the therapy more successful. However, the client should not be encouraged to talk throughout the whole massage. It is better to acknowledge the issue but not prolong the conversation. The therapy will be more successful without talking. Be a sympathetic listener. Don’t judge. Acknowledge the concern and move on with the massage.

If the therapist makes the mistake of giving advice, the client who does not follow that advice may be too embarrassed to make

another appointment. Once advice is given and things deteriorate the client may blame the therapist. They will blame the therapist even if the advice wasn't followed. If the client solicits the therapist for advice, the therapist who is not a psychologist should not respond by giving it. Even casual suggestions may propel the client to precipitous action.

It is common for clients to complain about bosses or spouses. They can berate them but that doesn't mean they want others to. Sympathy goes a long way.

A good therapist is like a good hairdresser. Both will see the client through the ups and downs over the years and still be there. Being a good listener and not getting involved is a big part of this longevity.

In massage school they teach proper draping techniques. It is best to follow the procedures taught in school. Sometimes a therapist will come up with their own draping techniques but if it doesn't cover a good portion of the body, it may come into question. It is possible a therapist may become comfortable with a client and neglect proper draping. Clients however like consistency. Proper draping protects a client's vulnerability and modesty. Sloppy draping could mistakenly sexualize the massage in the eyes of the client, simply because they are at the receiving end of it and don't know any better.

The client may wish to discard draping but to do so impairs the professional image of the therapist. It was not that long ago that massage had a stigma. By following the draping rules, the therapist helps protect the profession's reputation.

If the client should become overemotional, such as tearing, which has been known to happen, provide a glass of water and tissue. Sympathy may be proffered but, as described above, the therapist should be reticent in response. The object is to provide a massage or other bodywork in a relaxed free from stress environment.

With regard to the client's beliefs, the therapist should avoid judging. Nor should the therapist inflict personal beliefs on the client. Weighty issues of the day, including politics and religion, are better not debated. Even if the therapist agrees with the client's opinions, discussing them will not promote the relaxation necessary for massage.

The client has a reasonable expectation of professional behavior on the part of the therapist. Any unprofessional behavior by the therapist jeopardizes everything else, including the trust between client and therapist. The client will make judgments based on possibly very minor things like an improper drape, chewing gum, top cut too low, talking to someone else while massaging the client, leaving the massage room too often, messiness, any trace of the previous massage such as a soiled towel or opened magazine, an unkempt appearance, fingernails which are too long, or smoking in front of the client. Keeping a careful eye on the presentation as seen from the client's point of view is a big part of being professional.

The client is autonomous and has the right to agree to the massage and to end the massage. These decisions should be respected. If the client appears to be handicapped, assistance should not be given without asking if the client desires help.



A professional image requires draping.

Chapter Summary

- Even though a client may tell the therapist personal things, the therapist should not pry.
- With regard to the client's beliefs, the therapist should not judge.



The client has a reasonable expectation of professionalism.

Chapter 17

“Refuse any gifts or benefits which are intended to influence a referral, decision or treatment that are purely for personal gain and not for the good of the client.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“Recognize his/her influential position with the client and shall not exploit the relationship for personal or other gain.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice V (b)

Do not make a referral to another therapist simply because the therapist is getting a kickback. That is an ugly practice. Unless the referral benefits the client, it should not be made.

If the therapist is given money by a third party salesperson or owner to push a product, he or she should be careful that the product actually benefits the client and is something they actually desire. Beside the ethical implications, the client may come to resent being a repository of unneeded merchandise.

The author was loaded down with herbal pills by a massage therapist and eventually developed a cough which she blames on the therapist. Although the therapist gave a good massage, the author has not been back. Even one bottle to see if it would help might have been appropriate—the excess of the sales was a clue as to how much the therapist really cared about giving a message.

Just because some clients are polite does not mean they are happy with the way they were treated. The client’s intelligence

should not be underestimated. The therapist's main line of work is massage; care should be taken not to appear as a snake oil salesperson.

The industry is a caring one which looks out for the client. Observation of this paramount value will take care of this ethic.

Chapter Summary

- Do not make a referral to another therapist simply because the therapist is getting a kickback.
- The therapist should be careful that any product actually benefits the client and is something the client actually desires.

Chapter 18

“Follow all policies, procedures, guidelines, regulations, codes and requirements promulgated by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork.”

--NCBTMB Code of Ethics

“adhere to the NCBTMB Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, policies and procedures”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I a

“comply with the peer review process conducted by the NCBTMB Ethics and Standards Committee regarding any alleged violations of the NCBTMB Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I b

“remain in good standing with NCBTMB and maintain NCBTMB certification”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice I r

The nationally certified therapist has agreed to abide by the rules of the NCBTMB. The NCBTMB web site (<http://www.ncbtmb.com>) can be checked routinely to ascertain if changes have been made. Commercial software is available which will alert the user when a change is made to a web site.⁴⁹ Therapists using Microsoft Outlook for their e-mail can send themselves an e-mail set to arrive at a later date, reminding them

to check the site. Another time-delayed e-mail can then be generated as the next reminder. Google email also has a calendar which can be used for reminders. There are other free reminders available on the internet .

The NCBTMB does have disciplinary proceedings⁵⁰ so the Board is committed to enforcing the rules. The rules are enforced by The Ethics and Standards Committee, comprised of therapists and at least one member of the public. The Committee has an Investigative Panel which follows up complaints made against an NCBTMB member. Once a complaint is received, a 3 person investigative team can be constituted if necessary.

The Committee can revoke a therapist's certification, put a therapist on probation or simply require more education. The therapist's offense and the Committee's response are published on the Board's web site ([http://www.ncbtmb.com/ethics & standards.htm](http://www.ncbtmb.com/ethics_&_standards.htm)) and in the Board's newsletter.

Chapter Summary

- The nationally certified therapist has agreed to abide by the rules of the NCBTMB.
- The Committee can revoke a therapist's certification, put a therapist on probation or simply require more education.

Chapter 19

“recognize and limit the impact of transference and counter-transference between the client and the certificant.”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice V c

The NCBTMB defines *transference* as “a client’s unresolved feelings and issues which are unconsciously transferred to the practitioner” and *counter-transference* as “a practitioner’s unresolved feelings and issues which are unconsciously transferred to the client.”⁵¹

The two terms come from psychology where, originally regarded as impediments in the first part of the last century, they have become seen as essential parts of the psychological healing process.⁵² Massage is not psychology, however, and the NCBTMB does not want these dynamics in the massage room.

One way to avoid the issue is to establish rigorous boundaries and to monitor one’s thoughts and behavior for incidents coming close to the established limits. The therapist/client relationship is a professional commercial transaction and is not the appropriate forum to handle latent psychological issues.

The therapist can review their own feelings and issues to make sure they are kept outside of the session. But the Standard also requires the therapist to “limit the impact” of the client’s counter-transference. The therapist can move towards this goal by not becoming too friendly or familiar with the client. Time boundaries can be established by the therapist that will

emphasize the professional, non-personal nature of the session. One article recommends saying “I will be working on you for about fifteen minutes” and “I have about five minutes left. Is there any particular area you would like me to focus on for that time?”⁵³ This reinforces the professional, commercial nature of the session and diminishes the intimacy which may contribute to counter-transference.

Physical boundaries between the therapist and client will also inhibit transference. The therapist should be outside the room when the client disrobes or dresses and should utilize proper draping.

Chapter Summary

- The therapist/client relationship is a professional commercial transaction and is not the appropriate forum to handle latent psychological issues.
- Physical boundaries between the therapist and client will also inhibit transference.

Chapter 20

“avoid dual or multidimensional relationships that could impair professional judgment or result in the exploitation of the client or employees and/or co-workers.”

NCBTMB Standards of Practice V d

“refrain from participating in a sexual relationship or sexual conduct with the client, whether consensual or otherwise, from the beginning of the client/therapist relationship and for a minimum of six months after the termination of the client/therapist relationship”

--NCBTMB Standard of Practice VI a

A multidimensional relationship is one in which the therapist and client interact in ways outside the therapist/client paradigm.⁵⁴ This naturally makes things more complicated.

The Standard does not necessarily prohibit a relationship/friendship with the client outside the therapist/client model but it requires two tests be met. The multidimensional relationship must not impair professional judgment and it must not exploit the client or someone else.

There is a tendency to break the rules for friends. The multidimensional relationship client must be treated, ethically, the same as any other client in the work place.

Similarly, a therapist should not ask employees or co-workers for favors for a multidimensional relationship client if it would violate ethics.

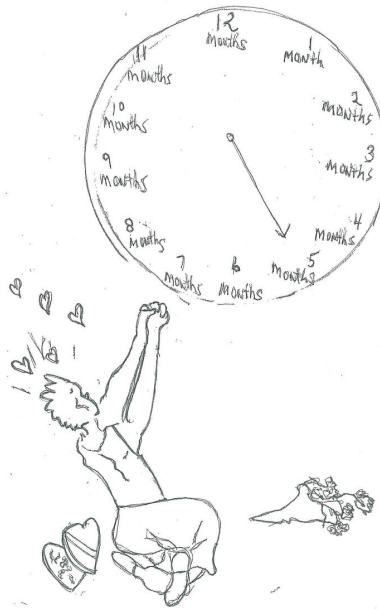
The therapist must see the multidimensional relationship client as a *client* when that role is being enacted. All the usual rules apply. Even when the multidimensional relationship client is in the non-client role, the therapist still has additional responsibilities above and beyond those of a normal business relationship or friendship. The therapist may still not exploit the client. There are many friendships in the real world where one party exploits the other and the other party, for whatever reason, remains in the friendship. In a multidimensional relationship, the therapist cannot be the exploiter.

The therapist should not take advantage of the disparity between therapist and client.⁵⁵ Threatening to divulge the client's status as a client unless allowed to participate in a business deal violates this Standard (as well as others.)

The relative intimacy of the massage setting may engender romantic ideas and it may be necessary to establish boundaries in the non-massage relationships—massage is what the therapist does for a living and does not suggest the therapist has inappropriate feelings or emotions about the client.⁵⁶ Any outside-of-massage relationship should be “non-damaging” to the client.⁵⁷ If the therapist becomes interested in moving beyond the multidimensional relationship into a sexual relationship, the multidimensional relationship must be ended. In other words, The NCBTMB requires the other person must cease to be a client and the couple must then wait six months to pursue a more intimate relationship. (See NCBTMB Standards of Practice VI (a).)

One author claims that certain other professions have ethics which forbid socializing or any non-professional interaction with clients.⁵⁸ That is not the ethical standard in massage but it is also

true the existence of multidimensional relationship makes the therapist's situation more challenging.⁵⁹



The National Standards of Practice require 6 months of non-client relationship prior to intimacy.

Chapter Summary

- A multidimensional relationship is one in which the therapist and client interact in ways outside the therapist/client paradigm.
- The multidimensional relationship must not impair professional judgment and it must not exploit the client or someone else.
- If the therapist becomes interested into a sexual relationship, the other person must cease to be a client and the couple must wait six months to pursue a more intimate relationship.

Chapter 21

“refrain from practicing under the influence of alcohol, drugs or any illegal substances (with the exception of a prescribed dosage of prescription medication which does not significantly impair the certificant.)”

NCBTMB Standards of Practice V (h)

The client expects their concerns to be put first and that they will be protected in a potentially vulnerable situation. This may be difficult to achieve if the therapist is not functioning at full capacity.

Alcoholic intoxication reduces fine motor control so a therapist in that condition might find it difficult to massage.⁶⁰ The condition can also result in profuse sweating which might prove uncomfortable to the client.⁶¹ At certain levels, the intoxicated person may engage in familiar or aggressive behavior which is inappropriate to the situation.⁶² This could create further ethical issues.

The first areas to be impaired are those requiring training and experience,⁶³ which is to say the very touchstones of a therapist’s professionalism are being attacked. Despite this, the intoxicated therapist may feel exceedingly confident, unaware that all is not as it should be.⁶⁴

Legal intoxication may occur between two and three drinks,⁶⁵ although “[s]ome performance degradation is observed at any measurable alcohol level.”⁶⁶ The relative impairment caused by intoxication may be gauged from the calculation that a

driver at the legal level of intoxication is 6 times more likely than a sober driver to have an accident.⁶⁷ It is unlikely that a therapist can maintain a useful session if they are six times less capable than usual.

Some antihistamines available without a prescription mimic alcoholic effects and should be avoided while working.⁶⁸ Fatigue can also produce intoxicated-like behavior. An Australian study showed impairment after being awake 17 hours.⁶⁹ At 24 hours without sleep, behavior was similar to that of a legally intoxicated person.⁷⁰

In some jurisdictions a therapist's license may be suspended if they are convicted of driving while intoxicated.⁷¹

Cannabis can also impair motor function and may lead to social withdrawal.⁷² This would be counterproductive as the client did not pay to be alone. Anxiety, panic and paranoia may occur.⁷³ Attention to tasks may decrease.⁷⁴

The therapist needs to be in charge to provide for both their safety and to maintain the professionalism of the setting. Alcohol or other substances degrade one's ability to perform these functions and should not be ingested prior to or at work.

Chapter Summary

- Legal intoxication may occur between two and three drinks.
- Some antihistamines available without a prescription mimic alcoholic effects and should be avoided while working.
- Fatigue can also produce intoxicated-like behavior.

Chapter 22

The Final Chapter

I hope I've made your class an educational and entertaining one. Thank you for using me to meet your continuing education needs. I hope you'll consider me in the future as well. Your feedback on this class is always welcome.

If you have any questions please e-mail me at go@apollo123.com or call 866-506-1999.

Best of fortune to you in your future in this exciting career!

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