

**The introduction**

The objective of this study is to understand the educational and practice experiences and needs of massage therapists who work in U.S. healthcare centers. Reliable data is needed to understand existing educational preparation for those working in healthcare center settings and medical care settings, specifically to better inform educators and practitioners for increasing healthcare integration opportunities.

**Purpose and aims**

**Specific aim 1:** To describe the experiences and education preparation of massage therapists working in U.S. healthcare centers.

**Specific aim 2:** To explore and describe field educational opinions of massage therapists working in U.S. healthcare centers.

**Specific aim 3:** To explore and describe the extent to which experiences and educational opinion differences exist between center healthcare massage therapists who do and do not have medical healthcare center setting experience.

These aims and related research questions are best addressed using a mixed methods research approach. The efforts reported here are those from the first, quantitative phase of an ongoing multi-phased mixed methods research study supported by the American Massage Therapy Association through the Healthcare Operational Committee.

**Methods**

**Design**

Cross-sectional, online survey study.

**Participants**

Massage therapists who self-identified as practicing in the United States and currently or have practiced massage therapy in a healthcare center setting. Massage therapy was defined as ‘... the application of massage and non-hand-on components, including health promotion education messages, for self-care and health maintenance within a patient-centered framework which includes assessment and evaluation/reassessment and reevaluation, care planning, treatment, documentation, and session closure.' Healthcare center was defined as an ‘organization, business, or institutions that provide preventive or medical care services to the public,’ e.g., chiropractors, physical therapy, hospitals, integrative clinics, outpatient centers, rehabilitation, therapeutic massage clinics with a physician, or other health provider help. Those who indicated ever working in an in- or outpatient medical clinic, hospital, doctor’s office or nursing home were coded: medical care setting experience.

**Recruitment**

Word-of-mouth, social media, 2 waves of mass email blasts to 20,000 AMTA members. Efforts invited participants to access the REDCap survey via a secured survey link.

**Measures**

A unique, four part survey was developed and used for this study.

1. Study description, educational experiences and career information.
2. Participant personal demographics (6 questions: age, gender, education, etc)
3. Professional characteristics (7 questions: years in practice, hours of training, etc)
4. Healthcare setting experience & educational opinion survey.

All data were collected electronically through Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap).

**RESULTS**

**Table 1:** Significant Comparisons

- **Therapists in medical healthcare settings:**
  - older
  - national credentials
  - more years of therapy experience
  - higher proportion of independent contractors, voluntary, and hourly wage agreements.

- Similar average years until healthcare setting entry (5-7 years) may suggest similar service employment environments at professional for therapists.

- No non-medical setting therapists indicated a Hospice work environment.

- Most respondents indicated benefits from their work in healthcare settings but those in non-medical settings had higher proportions of no benefits while those in medical settings had higher proportions receiving every type of benefit.

- 67% of those who indicated receiving benefits from their employers received two or more benefit types.

**Figure 3:** Education Readiness for Success (Percentage of N=386)

- Participants indicated any and all options in Figure 4 if they thought would have better prepared them at entry to work in the healthcare center environment.

- 26% strongly agreed their initial massage training prepared them for healthcare environment.

- Greater proportions of medical setting massage therapists believe their initial massage education did not provide the tools and/or knowledge to work successfully in the healthcare center environment (44% vs. 29%; p=0.003).

**Figure 4:** Education Readiness for Success (Percentage of N=386)

- Participants indicated which additional training options in Figure 4 if they thought would have better prepared them at entry to work in the healthcare center environment.

- More 10%, 2% think an Associate’s, Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees, respectively, are required.

**Figure 5:** Healthcare Center Therapists and Entry Level Massage Education

- 58% (29%) think massage therapists should have education beyond entry level to work in a healthcare center setting.

- Smaller proportion among those not in medical settings (74% vs. 87%; p<0.01).

**CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS**

- **Take-away points**
  - Massage therapist employment experiences vary for those in healthcare center environments.
  - Respondents generally agree that additional education is needed for therapists in healthcare centers.
  - Healthcare center environment experience (medical vs. non-medical setting) influences education and awareness beliefs and expectations for massage therapy professionals.

- **Future efforts**
  - Additional collected survey variables need to be cleaned and analyzed.
  - Qualitative interviews of a participant subsample is pending (52% indicated willingness to interview).

- **Acknowledgments**
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