

educator news august 2013

Review of the private health insurance rebate for natural therapies

The Natural Therapies Review Advisory Committee (NTRAC) has now met three times since it was convened. AMT was invited to the NTRAC meeting on May 1 to present the key points from our submission to the Chief Medical Officer (CMO). It was possibly the most important 15-minute presentation in AMT's long history, an unprecedented opportunity to showcase the impressive evidence base for massage therapy in front of the most senior public health bureaucrat in Australia.

AMT's presentation received glowing reviews from members of the NTRAC committee and was warmly received by the CMO, Professor Chris Baggoley. We have since provided the CMO with the updated version of the classified research database that was released by AMT in early June.

AMT's presentation notes are still available for download from the AMT website. The notes include citations for the Level 1 and 2 evidence for the efficacy of massage therapy in the treatment of major health conditions experienced by Australians. It is a useful overview of the research for all educators. You'll find the presentation here:

<http://www.amt.org.au/SiteContent/Forms/NTRAC%20handout.pdf>

NTRAC met again on August 8. AMT was extremely fortunate to connect with Professor Baggoley immediately after this meeting, at the launch of the Australian Centre for Research in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM). Professor's Baggoley's speech at the launch was incredibly encouraging. He spoke warmly and respectfully about the role that complementary health practitioners play in the health system, with consultations by complementary practitioners now exceeding GP consultations in Australia.

Fortunately, AMT had the opportunity to bend the CMO's ear and get an up-to-the minute report on the progress of the natural therapies review. It is unclear at this stage if a change of government will affect the work of the review committee but what is certain is that the review process will take substantially longer than the original one-year brief. The CMO flagged the fact that the 1 January 2014 deadline will be extended to allow the NHMRC the necessary time to complete their evidence review. This is probably not terribly surprising given that the NHMRC review of homeopathy, which commenced in April 2012 and was due to be completed in June this year, has been extended till April 2015. With multiple modalities on the table, the CMO anticipates a lengthy process. Massage therapy will be in the last cluster of modalities to be reviewed by the NHMRC, essentially because it is the largest body of work and has the largest evidence base to appraise.

Australian Centre for Research in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM)

As I mentioned above, ARCCIM's official launch was held on August 8. ARCCIM is an initiative of Jon Adams, Professor of Public Health at the University of Technology in Sydney. He established ARCCIM in 2012 to address the obvious need for public health and health services research in complementary and integrative medicine. Research undertaken by the Centre focuses on complementary medicine practice and use, the interface between complementary and conventional practitioners, and assessing implications for policy, practice and patient care.



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We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to Jon for the work he has done to ensure that complementary practices such as massage therapy are given due consideration in the public health discourse. With millions of consultations occurring annually, there is a clear need for credible research to inform policy makers on how best to integrate the various kinds of health services to maximise patient outcomes.

Jon managed to assemble a stellar cast of speakers for the launch, testament to the influence that ARCCIM is starting to wield in the arena of public health policy. AMT is partnering with ARCCIM to conduct practice-based research into patients of massage therapy in Australia. We look forward to reporting on the progress of this research at the AMT Annual Conference in October and in future editions of Educator News.

Medibank Private News

By now you would be painfully aware of Medibank's recent announcement that, from September 1, they will not be accepting any new requests from Remedial Massage Therapists for Medibank Private numbers. Medibank has taken this action in the context of explosive growth in the number of provider locations registered with them over the last three years. There are now over 42,000 remedial massage provider locations registered on Medibank's books. That's a lot of locations and a lot of provider numbers.

Understandably, Medibank's decision has caused great angst and concern. It will impact graduates who complete their training after September 1 and already-qualified therapists who are perhaps relocating or wishing to add extra practice locations. However, it is important to note that it is business as usual for therapists with stable practice addresses.

With such a large number of provider locations registered on their system, Medibank clearly has to find ways to better manage the risks associated with use of provider numbers, including ensuring that their members receive quality services from qualified, ethical practitioners. In this context, it is perhaps a little more understandable that Medibank will use this temporary closure to further analyse the providers and locations they currently have registered on their system and clean out any old and invalid locations or suspect providers.

AMT is in close dialogue with Peter Dunn, National Ancillary Operations Manager for Medibank Private. We are working cooperatively and constructively to pave the way forward for Medibank to reopen their books. We met with Peter on August 7 to discuss Medibank's concerns and proposed criteria for recognition of Remedial Massage providers in the future. We are cautiously optimistic that these negotiations will result in a positive outcome and there will be a return to business as usual with Medibank soon.

AMT Classified Research Database

AMT released an updated research database at the beginning of July. Originally released in January 2013 in connection with the Natural Therapies Review, AMT has committed to updating this invaluable resource twice a year. We will continue to make the database publicly available to therapists, educators, legislators, third party payment providers and members of the public via the AMT website. You will find the June release of the research database here:

<http://www.amt.org.au/SiteContent/Forms/AMT%20Classified%20Research%20July%202013.pdf>

The newly-released version of the database contains several significant innovations. It includes a summary of the current state of the evidence and hyperlinks to free text research available on the web ... now accessible to you at the click of a button! We have also produced the "State of the Evidence" summary as a discrete download:

<http://www.amt.org.au/SiteContent/Forms/State%20of%20Evidence%20July%202013.pdf>