

educator news march 2014

Training Package Review

The final draft of the new training package competencies will be released for comment and feedback on March 10.

AMT has been involved in the Subject Matter Expert Groups for the revision of the Certificate IV in Massage Therapy Practice, the Diploma of Remedial Massage and the Diploma of Traditional Chinese Medicine Remedial Massage.

This current training package revision has special significance in light of Medibank Private's move to intervene at the level of training delivery. It is an opportunity for all stakeholders to ensure that the training packages for massage therapy have the necessary rigour to satisfy the demand for national consistency and meet standards that are commensurate with expectations of practitioners operating in the health marketplace.

The new draft versions of the training package will be available for download from the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council website. AMT will notify all RTOs of how and where to access the draft units of competence as soon as they become available.

Medibank update

At the close of 2013, Medibank Private provided AMT with an addendum outlining new terms and conditions for issuing provider numbers to remedial massage therapists. The AMT Board invested six weeks performing due diligence on the new Medibank terms, including seeking legal counsel. AMT entered into formal legal negotiations with Medibank on 13 February. The purpose of these negotiations is to broker the best possible outcome for both AMT members and the massage therapy industry at large, to ensure that current and future provider privileges are not compromised or eroded by Medibank's proposed changes. As at early March, it would appear that AMT is the only industry representative body to be in ongoing negotiations with Medibank, with all other referring Associations signing off on Medibank's requirements.

Research agreement with ARCCIM

AMT has now signed a research services agreement with the Australian Research Centre in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM) to proceed with the study of patient expectations, perceptions and experiences of massage therapy use in health care management. AMT has committed \$20,000 of funding to this project, which will provide invaluable data to support AMT's advocacy projects and help build the evidence-based case for embedding massage therapy in the mainstream healthcare system. With survey design complete and ethics approval now granted, the project will soon go into its active phase, commencing with an online workforce survey.

The chief investigator on the project, Dr Jon Wardle, recently gave an interview for the AMT journal. The interview has been appended to this edition of Educator News to give you an overview of the research project.



2014 AMT Conference

The 2014 AMT Annual Conference will be held at Flemington Event Centre, Melbourne, from the 17 – 19 October. The full program will be released online in mid-May. Conference brochures will be circulated in June. We look forward to again hosting international presenters, Bethany Ward and Larry Koliha, who made a big impression when they visited Australia in 2011.

Research Study Update with Dr Jon Wardle

by Kat Boehringer

In the previous issue of *In Good Hands*, AMT spoke to Professor Jon Adams, director of the UTS-based Australian Research Centre in Complementary and Integrative Medicine (ARCCIM), about our exciting new research collaboration. We are happy to announce that the project is closer to completion: there is now a signed agreement in place between AMT and ARCCIM, and ethics approval for the study has been granted.

AMT members will soon have the opportunity to participate in this groundbreaking project. In this issue, we chat to ARCCIM's Dr Jonathan Wardle, about the implications of this study and the role AMT members will play in shaping the Australian massage research landscape ...

Despite the important and increasing role of massage therapists in healthcare delivery in Australia, the massage workforce has so far largely escaped examination, according to ARCCIM's Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dr Jon Wardle. An innovative study, partnered by AMT and ARCCIM, aims to provide the first stage in filling this research gap by systematically examining patient perceptions of the massage therapist workforce in Australia, as well as their experiences of massage therapy.

"Massage has a good evidence base. What it doesn't have is a reason beyond that evidence base for further inclusion (into the healthcare system). This study is about being strategic in professional development and offering the building blocks for further development," Dr Wardle said.

The study will provide the first critical, systematic examination of patient expectations of their massage therapists, and systematically explore their motivations for using massage therapy. There will be two arms to the study: a practitioner survey, and a patient survey. Dr Wardle said:

"Initially, we are going to be asking every member of AMT to complete a survey so we can get a sample of answers that is representative of AMT therapists.

"I don't think the government appreciates how big an industry the massage profession is and how much it adds to the Australian economy."

"We are going to be asking practitioners questions such as what conditions are being treated, how many patients are being seen ... simple things which are very important in developing effective policies regarding the profession.

"We want to give health policy makers and insurers an idea of what the massage workforce out there is doing, how big it is, the extent of the health services it is providing, and what kind of role massage therapists are playing within the health sector."

From these surveys, a representative sample of 25 practitioners will be chosen to take part in the second arm of the study: patient surveys. Data will be collected from patients of massage therapy clinics in Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Dr Wardle provides the rationale:

"We are focusing on urban areas for a couple of reasons. Firstly, we already have data on rural massage practices; and, secondly, we need to focus on the larger centres to get enough (in terms of population) data that governments, policy makers and insurers can take seriously.

"Our previous research has found that people who are using massage therapy in rural areas are generally using it for the same reasons as people who are living in urban areas. The main difference is that there is a higher prevalence of use for manual therapies in regional areas than in urban areas."¹

A questionnaire will be designed for distribution to massage patients, to be completed in waiting rooms immediately after consultation with their massage therapist. These questionnaires will be distributed to consecutive patients of the chosen practitioners. Dr Wardle explains:

"We will be asking things such as: Why are they choosing massage? Are they choosing massage for some conditions over other therapies that might be also treating those conditions, for example, chiropractic, or physiotherapy? What areas do patients themselves think that massage should address to achieve a more important role in healthcare than it currently has?

"This way, we can identify priorities for future research, and to give practitioners and associations an idea of what patients want massage to be."

The project aims to provide outcomes relevant to policy and practice, which will be of real benefit to patients, practitioners, healthcare managers and policy makers.

In terms of policy, the study hopes to have wide-reaching benefits as outlined by Dr Wardle:

“Massage, like other complementary therapies, is going through a few challenges at the moment in terms of the review of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health Insurance for natural therapies, and the recent Medibank Private situation.

“A lot of those things have arisen through lack of knowledge about what is actually happening out there so, by collecting this data and then showing what massage therapists are doing, we can avoid making ‘policy on the run’ and, instead, make policy that actually reflects what is happening out there.

“I don’t think the government appreciates how big an industry the massage profession is and how much it adds to the Australian economy. Unnecessary restrictions can adversely affect that. So this study is not just about what is good for the patients but it actually provides information that can help the profession make a case for its own development as well.

“Most of us know what is happening in practice, anecdotally at least, but what this research provides is data that governments, policy makers, and insurers are willing to use, to make a case for what we hope is more appropriate treatment of the massage profession.”

Dr Wardle states it is also hoped massage therapists will benefit from the study on a practice level:

“The data could help ensure that resources used in promotion are invested wisely. For example, the patient data will be particularly helpful for therapists to see what patients are actually using massage for.

“We will be able to show this to GPs, for example, and tell them which conditions patients value massage therapy for, so they can refer patients on appropriately.

“If we can show that patients get the best benefits from their therapists working collaboratively with other therapists, then this would make a case for practitioners – for example physiotherapists – not to be so competitive.

“I think it will open people’s eyes to the areas where massage is considered particularly valuable, and what roles need to be further explored.”

Distribution of the practitioner surveys is planned for the first half of this year. Dr Wardle will be attending the AMT annual general meeting, to be held on April 13, to answer any questions regarding the research project.

Stay tuned for further updates. ■amt



Jon Wardle is a Chancellor’s Research Fellow at the Faculty of Nursing Midwifery and Health, University of Technology, Sydney. He is a founding Director of the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NORPHCAM) and is a core committee member of the Public Health Association of Australia’s Research Advisory Group as well as its Evidence, Research and Policy in Complementary Medicine Special Interest Group. In addition to his academic roles, Jon has clinical backgrounds in naturopathy and nursing. His research interests include health policy, professionalisation and public health and health services research related to complementary medicine.

1. J Wardle, CW Lui, J Adams (2012), ‘Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Rural Communities: Current Research and Future Directions’, *The Journal of Rural Health* 28 (1), 101-112.