

## APPENDIX 1

### CONDUCTING THE CODE by Natalie Millan

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***Legal liabilities, understanding our laws and upholding professional accountabilities, are reasons why ethics need to be recognised, but what are the given purposes that lie behind a code of Ethics?***

***She explains.....***

According to the AAMT Code of Ethics, the purpose of having ethics is to guide the massage therapist toward educated and informed decision making behaviour. This is for their own integrity, protection of professional reputation, and to retain modesty of clients.

Legal, moral and social analysis of associations and members can be investigated by law if there is a discrepancy. Therefore all associations such as AAMT are bound to inform members of their Code of Ethics, which establish minimal standards of ethical practice. The intentions are to serve and protect the general public while rightly protecting therapists and their governing bodies.

Regardless of the diverse treatments and approaches preferred by individual massage therapists, it is a fact that there are common ethical issues. American authority Dr Ben Benjamin, co-author of the Ethics of Touch, describes several issues with common examples being tangible values, boundaries, laws and professionalism. Australian therapists can add the potential cultural differences and communications that may be encountered.

Reputable standards of training always require review and continued education; ethical standards are not immune to such review. However ethical review does suggest that one is required to look at their personal behaviour and professional set of values.

Personal values are vast due to unique experiences and belief systems. Although there isn't one simple definition to ethical conduct, the examination of our personal values assists the development of our professional ethics. Often the suggestion of reviewing one's behavioural conduct can be met with the common response of resistance.

Reviewing ethical standards may be best considered as an opportunity to develop your existing positive behaviours by increasing a learning approach within, around and behind your practice. A willingness to learn will enhance and assist your attributes by continuing to develop as a more efficient and skilled therapist.

The conduct toward client comfort and safety is of utmost importance. Exploring professional behaviour and personal values will compliment awareness of ethical principles and responsibilities.

#### **Unpacking the Principles**

According to the AAMT Code of Ethics, there are 5 principle commitments relative to therapist therapies. These include wellbeing, confidentiality, competency, commitment and attitude.

## **1. Wellbeing**

Much can be said about wellbeing as the wellbeing of the therapist and of the client is foremost. If the client has made the decision to undertake massage treatment, it is derivative to their experience or condition which has prompted their need. The client's decision to seek treatment and the therapist's decision of appropriate treatment encompasses the key focus of the wellbeing principles. Wellbeing involves change, treatments need to be re-assessed and adjusted, therefore this principle requires the therapist to communicate any modifications to the client.

## **2. Confidentiality**

Therapists are well educated about the importance of keeping clinical records confidential. In addition therapists are bound by the ethics of confidentiality in communication between client, colleagues and other members of the public. Confidential conduct also requires a therapist to consider refraining from approaching a client in public. Therapists cannot assume their clients want it publicly known that they are being treated. This may not always be fully relevant, but the awareness of how not to risk breaching confidentiality is. The example of being in a public setting could be to wait until the client makes first contact. Confidentiality within the treatment room is necessary to establish trust and client/therapist rapport. Alliance and client consent is necessary if treatments need further investigation with other professionals or a supervisor. Research suggests that therapists monitor and assess the requirements of rapport and the importance of alliance with the client.

## **3. Competency**

Clinical competence holds a professional alliance to Standards of Practice and continued education. Accepted techniques are to be performed according to the client's needs. Competency is learnt ethical skill that can be enhanced with educated training and experience in application of accepted treatment techniques. As with all the principles, competency extends into the ethical boundaries of behavioural conduct. There is an expectation from the general public of the 'right' conduct to be performed by a therapist and competency in behaviour, moral support, communication and application of treatment will fall into this public expectation.

## **4. Commitment**

The principle of commitment starts with the therapist, toward their continued training, self-development, passion for their profession, obligation towards qualifications and towards their own wellbeing and self motivation. This commitment will be evident within a therapist's practice and in turn may motivate clients to become committed to their own quality of life. All therapists perform a leadership role and it is an accepted fact that inspiring leadership will motivate people to remain within an organisation or in a therapist's case, within their practice. Clients will observe how therapists are committed to their profession and to themselves. Kieran Perkins, cited in Petria Thomas' book *Swimming Against the Tide*, states how leading by example gives others motivation to draw strength from.

## **5. Attitude**

Professional attitude requires enough self-efficacy to uphold rules, regulations and values toward colleagues and within the industry. Professional attitude allows a therapist to support and encourage colleagues through professional development, attending peer group supervision and mentoring. In order for professional attitude to support others and to encourage others to increase their own self-efficacy, Egan (2002) emphasises that your support must be real and this extends to your support of another colleague also being real.

The conduct of these 5 principles helps clarify boundaries. Clients always absorb therapist behaviour and often it is not what is said, or even what is treated that becomes the sole purpose of the client's choice to remain within your practice. Your client remains because of your rapport that provides the safety your client feels inside and the trust established which they talk about outside your practice.

Ethics is about learning and understanding a greater language with people.

Values differ between personal, professional, industrial and organisational bodies. Yet consistent practice of strong ethics creates accepted conduct within your relevant association, leadership with clients and beneficial networking with other health professionals.

### **References include:**

AAMT Code of Ethics

AAMT Standards of Practice

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