<table>
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<th>Project title:</th>
<th>Professional Status Imbalances Within an Interprofessional Context: A View of Massage Therapy</th>
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**PROJECT OVERVIEW**

**How does this study contribute to the MT knowledge base:**
As massage therapy continues to evolve as a health care profession, massage therapists are working in a variety of different health care settings. As a result, they are increasingly interacting with and beginning to collaborate with different health care professionals (e.g. nurse, physiotherapists) in the context of care delivery. This study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the professionalization of massage therapy, specifically, how massage therapists are perceived within an interprofessional and collaborative context. In addition, improving the professional status of massage therapists and their ability to collaborate with other health care professionals has the potential to improve patient care.

**About the study:**
The objectives of the study were to investigate health professionals’ views of perceived barriers to increased professionalization, status and interprofessional collaboration in relation to massage therapy.

**Study design:**
The researcher conducted a study that used an exploratory case study approach.

**Ethics:**
Ethical approval was obtained before the study commenced from a local Research Ethics Committee.

**The study participants:**
A range of health care professionals who worked in two hospitals in a large Canadian city, which included: physicians (3), nurses (3), physiotherapist (2), and massage therapists (2).

**Data collected:**
*Interviews:* 10 semi structured interviews with a sample of health care professionals identified through a purposive sampling strategy. One in-depth interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews aimed to explore experiences and perceptions of massage therapy/massage therapists pertaining to their place within health care settings within an interprofessional context. An interview guide was used. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to facilitate the analysis.

**Data analysis:**
Data were analyzed using inductive thematic coding to generate key themes.
Results:
Based on the analysis of the qualitative data, the researcher reported the following findings:

Theme 1: Problematization of the term “massage” – The term massage is associated with sex work activity rather than health care.

Theme 2: Professional exclusion – Massage therapists remain on the periphery as they are not fully included in all activities of the team (e.g. interprofessional meetings).

Theme 3: Lack of knowledge about massage therapy – A number of questions about massage, specifically regarding training and regulation, revealed the limited knowledge that (non-massage) participants had about massage therapy.

Theme 4: Interprofessional hierarchies – An unavoidable issue which exists at the system, where certain health care professions are viewed to have a higher or different status than others.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS
The findings of this study suggest that although the popularity among health consumers has grown significantly, within the health care system, massage therapists continue to function from a peripheral position. This means that they are not fully included or accepted within the interprofessional mix of health care providers in the context of care provision. The findings also point to the fact that others have limited knowledge about massage therapy as a health care profession and there continue to be associations with negative stereotypes. These findings suggest that although massage therapists may be working in various health care settings, a primary step to becoming fully integrated and respected within these setting is education – the massage therapists should and need to spend time to provide opportunities where others may learn about the profession, how massage therapists work, and how they contribute to patient care. It is critical that this is done within a collaborative context, which means that the massage therapists is knowledgeable about what others do and how they contribute to be able to identify similarities and areas of overlap and distinct ways in which a massage therapist contributes.

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