Introduction

Massage Therapy is a regulated health profession in Ontario. It is governed by the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (the RHPA) and the *Massage Therapy Act, 1991*. The RHPA requires that regulatory Colleges such as the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO) develop, establish and maintain standards of professional ethics for registrants (Massage Therapists/MTs). A number of College sources including the College’s Standards of Practice and professional misconduct regulation articulate explicit expectations with respect to ethical behaviour and attitudes. In addition, the CMTO Code of Ethics is a resource to support Massage Therapists in understanding and applying the ethical principles and values which are foundational to the practice of the profession.

As regulated health professionals, Massage Therapists must ensure that they maintain the public’s confidence in the profession and provide the highest level of competent, safe and ethical Massage Therapy care possible. This is accomplished by fulfilling the MT’s role as a healthcare professional with integrity, and by conscientiously exercising professional judgment.

The College of Massage Therapists of Ontario’s Code of Ethics is grounded in four ethical principles:

**To do good and actively benefit clients**
To do good and actively benefit clients is called “Beneficence”. It fulfills the goal of serving clients’ best interests, Massage Therapists endeavour to do good and benefit clients as an integral part of Massage Therapy practice.

**Respect for Persons** - To treat all persons with respect and dignity
To fulfill the goal of treating clients with respect and dignity, Massage Therapists acknowledge clients’ intrinsic humanity and their worthiness to be treated with compassion and consideration, as well as clients’ right to be the decision-makers in their healthcare treatment.

**To do no harm, and whenever possible prevent harm from occurring**
To do no harm, and whenever possible prevent harm from occurring is called “Nonmaleficence”. It fulfills the goal of protecting clients’ best interests, Massage Therapists ensure that they do no harm to clients and, whenever possible, take every precaution to prevent harm from occurring to them.

**Accountability** - To act responsibly in the practice of Massage Therapy
To fulfill the goal of acting responsibly in professional practice, Massage Therapists act to uphold the public trust by ensuring that they act in clients’ best interest and not the Therapist’s. This is the principle that holds Massage Therapists accountable not just for their own actions and behaviors, but for those of their colleagues as well.

To explain and support what the above principles require, CMTO’s Code of Ethics provides guidance that clearly articulates the behaviors and attitudes expected of Massage Therapists.

**Who does the CMTO Code of Ethics Apply to?**
CMTO’s Code of Ethics provides guidance to all Massage Therapists in Ontario, however it can also be used as guidance for/by Massage Therapy students, educators, researchers and others associated with or working with Registered Massage Therapists in Ontario.

**Using Professional Judgment**

Although the Code of Ethics provides Massage Therapists with guidance, Massage Therapists may encounter situations where the application of the principles of ethics may not appear clear to them. In these instances, Massage Therapists should endeavor to apply their professional judgment in interpreting and applying relevant principles and guidelines.

In exercising professional judgment, Massage Therapists ought to consider: the best interests of the client, including their wishes; the ethical and legal requirements of the profession; and the Code of Ethics – Glossary of Terms, included as a companion resource to the CMTO Code of Ethics.
Principle 1: To Do Good and Actively Benefit Clients (Beneficence)

To fulfill the goal of serving clients’ best interests, Massage Therapists endeavour to do good and benefit clients as an integral part of Massage Therapy practice. In achieving this principle, Massage Therapists:

a) commit to serving and benefiting their clients by using their knowledge, skill and professional judgment;
b) ensure that their professional knowledge and skill are current, based on education, available scientific evidence and clinical experience;
c) provide clients with relevant and sufficient information to allow for informed decision-making about their healthcare;
d) encourage client engagement and focus on client goals and preferences;
e) use written and oral communication to facilitate client understanding and conflict resolution;
f) are aware of and attentive to transference and counter transference in the client/Therapist relationship;
g) provide fair and equitable access, and consistent quality care to all clients, regardless of social/economic status, culture, or any other factors which may unfairly bias client care; and
h) endeavour to be knowledgeable about other regulated health professions and work collaboratively with them in consultation, communication and documentation to improve client care, reduce risks, increase client safety and optimize healthcare outcomes.

Principle 2: Respect for Persons
To Treat All Persons with Respect and Dignity

To fulfill the goal of treating clients with respect and dignity, Massage Therapists acknowledge clients’ intrinsic humanity and their worthiness to be treated with compassion and consideration, as well as clients’ right to be the decision-makers in their healthcare treatment. In achieving this principle, Massage Therapists:

a) treat their clients with respect and dignity and recognize their ethical and legal rights to be treated as autonomous decision-makers in their healthcare;
b) practise non-discriminatory care and treat clients with sensitivity, care, courtesy and consideration;
c) respect clients’ cultural origins, moral and religious values and beliefs and provide culturally sensitive care;
d) obtain client’s informed consent to treatment prior to provision of care and respect the client’s right to accept or refuse treatment without prejudice;
e) recognize and respect the right of an authorized substitute decision-maker to make treatment decisions on behalf of a client who is not capable of providing consent;

f) ensure that their views about the client’s personal life, beliefs, values, and identities, including but not limited to gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, national or ethnic origin, race, genetic characteristics, disability and marital or family status do not prejudice their opinion of the client or affect the quality of care provided;

g) recognize the power imbalance inherent in the client/therapist relationship and maintain professional boundaries;

h) keep personal health information or other personal information concerning a client confidential, except with the consent of the client or as permitted or required by law; and

i) provide clients with advance notice when discharging them from care and provide them with a referral or the relevant information to obtain alternate care from another Massage Therapist to ensure continuity of care.

It is also important for MTs to treat themselves with respect and dignity. In achieving the principle of respect for persons (themselves), Massage Therapists:

a) commit to self-care and personal health and wellness;

b) recognize when they are not competent to provide care and take the necessary action(s) to obtain the support and/or assistance to recover and remediate any personal, emotional, mental or physical health challenges;

c) recognize their right to refuse to provide care to clients who are:
   • emotionally, mentally, sexually or physically abusive to the therapist;
   • unable or unwilling to provide payment for the care requested;
   • under the influence of drugs or alcohol and appear to be, in the Massage Therapist’s professional judgement, limited or impeded in their ability to consent to treatment.

Principle 3: To Do No Harm and Prevent Harm Whenever Possible (Nonmaleficience)

In achieving the goal of doing no harm to clients, Massage Therapists also, whenever possible, take precautions to prevent harm from occurring to them. In achieving this principle, Massage Therapists:

a) refrain from participating in behaviours that could potentially harm clients and make every reasonable and conscientious effort to prevent harm to clients;

b) ensure that they have the knowledge, skill and experience to practice and are free from any cognitive, physical, psychological or emotional conditions or dependence on alcohol or drugs that might impair their professional ability;
c) practise only within their scope of practice, recognize their limitations and, when appropriate, refer clients to a colleague or other health professional whose expertise can best address client needs;
d) act with honesty and transparency if harm does occur, take responsibility for disclosing this harm to the client and initiate steps to minimize the harm and prevent future occurrences;
e) ensure that they provide clients with the information they need to make informed decisions regarding treatment, and obtain clients’ informed consent prior to treatment;
f) maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and sharing client information with colleagues or other health professionals, and in the relocation and disposal of records they control;
g) avoid dual relationships with clients;
h) avoid treating family and friends except in exceptional circumstances1;
i) ensure that the client/therapist relationship is not exploited by the Massage Therapist for any personal, social, emotional and/or financial reason(s);
j) provide therapeutic touch and address incidental contact thoughtfully and tactfully in a sensitive and professional manner;
k) do not, under any circumstance, participate in any form of sexual behaviour with clients, including “consensual” behaviours2;
l) do not, under any circumstance, participate in any form of harassment of clients, colleagues, other health professionals, administrative or office support staff;
m) maintain a clean, hygienic and safe working environment at all times;
n) maintain clear, legible and comprehensive client and business records, and ensure that these are securely retained, and access is restricted to authorized personnel only; and
o) guard against any real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest, inform all parties and resolve the situation in the best interests of the client3.

Principle 4: Accountability
To Act Responsibly in the Practice of the Profession of Massage Therapy

To fulfill the goal of acting responsibly in professional practice, Massage Therapists uphold the public trust by ensuring that they act in clients’ best interest and not the Therapist’s. This is the principle that holds Massage Therapists accountable not just for their own actions and behaviors, but for those of their colleagues as well. In achieving this principle, Massage Therapists:

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1 As discussed in CMTO’s Standard for Maintaining Professional Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse
2 This is defined as sexual abuse in the RHPA. Please see the Standard for Maintaining Professional Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse for additional information.
3 See the College’s Conflict of Interest Guidelines.
a) recognize that self-regulation of the profession is a privilege and that each Massage Therapist individually, and the profession collectively, has a professional responsibility to maintain public trust and confidence;

b) conduct themselves with personal and professional integrity at all times;

c) assume responsibility for managing their practice environments for decisions made in practicing the profession, and taking appropriate action when necessary;

d) recognize that they are responsible for ensuring that their ethical and professional obligations (as outlined in this Code of Ethics, legislation and other governance documents) always take priority and override (if they differ from) expectations of employers or considered the norm in a mixed practice setting;

e) report incompetent or unethical behavior by colleagues or other health professionals that may compromise client care or safety;

f) do not participate in any kind of fraud including but not limited to fraudulent billing practices;

g) do not participate in any form of advertising or promotion that contravenes applicable legislation or regulation, reflects poorly on the profession or breaches public trust and confidence;

h) do not participate in conduct which could bring disrepute to or discredit the profession (“conduct unbecoming”); this includes but is not limited to conduct in the RMT’s personal life which is inconsistent with the standards of integrity and professionalism expected of a Massage Therapist as a regulated health professional;

i) continuously participate in mechanisms, including the CMTO’s Quality Assurance Program, which facilitate their growth and development and support them in providing and maintaining the best possible quality client care;

j) participate in continuous evaluation of practice and are responsive to the outcomes of evaluations, undertaking constructive changes or further training if necessary, or if required, dutifully complying with any disciplinary findings that may be imposed to meet professional standards;

k) are committed to working collaboratively with other healthcare professionals, third-party payers and the public on cost-effective care; and

l) do not justify unethical behaviour by rationalizing that such behavior is not expressly articulated in this document or other legislation or regulation.