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Project Topic:

Flunking or Flying Colours: A Canadian MT Education Environmental Scan

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Abstract

Background: Massage therapists have been a part of Canadian’s healthcare since 1919. Over the past 100 years, the profession has gone through great change resulting in adjustments to pre-service education as well. The most recent change was the implementation of massage therapy (MT) education program accreditation of. In light of the likely disruption as a result of programs becoming accredited, a scan of the current state of MT education was undertaken. The results of this environmental scan are most useful when applied to the context of MT in Canada. However, stakeholders in other countries may also find them interesting and valuable when considering challenges facing their own education programs.

Methods: An approach described by Hodges et al. was used to frame this study. This approach included interviewing stakeholders regarding the current state of MT education and analyzing their comments for common themes.

Results: Sixty-four individuals, from nine provinces and one territory, were invited to participate. Twenty-one individuals participated. Four themes were constructed based on the participants’ comments about challenges facing MT Education: variation, isolation, stagnation, and accreditation.

Conclusions: An environmental scan was undertaken to create a point of comparison for the future state of MT education. Participants described three challenges they faced: variation, isolation and stagnation, which they hope would be remedied by recently implemented program accreditation. The themes that described the challenges faced by stakeholders mirror those of the profession. By describing the challenges experienced by stakeholders, we will be able to monitor the impact of accreditation on the environment of Canadian MT education.

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1. Introduction

Massage therapists have been a part of Canadian’s healthcare since 1919. Over the past 100 years, the profession has gone through great change resulting in adjustments to pre-service education as well. The most recent change was the implementation of massage therapy (MT) education program accreditation of. In light of the likely disruption as a result of programs becoming accredited, a scan of the current state of MT education was undertaken. The results of this environmental scan are most useful when applied to the context of MT in Canada. However, stakeholders in other countries may also find them interesting and valuable when considering challenges facing their own education programs.

To be most useful, it is important to describe the context of MT regulation, practice and education. In Canada, four provincial governments regulate massage therapists: British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Ontario (1-4). There are efforts to regulate in many unregulated provinces and territories, and each is at a different stage of the

regulatory process. In Alberta and Manitoba, they are in the process of developing a transitional regulatory council (5, 6). Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan are proposing regulation (7, 8). Other provinces and territories, such as the Northwest Territories, are engaging in general efforts to seek regulation (9). The diverse regulatory landscape results in differing roles and responsibilities for massage therapists depending on the jurisdiction in which they live and work. This also means that there may be parallel differences in education, although little has been studied or published.

Canadian MT education programs encompass a broad spectrum of program types, lengths, and sizes, depending on the type of institution, province, and individual program. In 2013, it was estimated that there were 85 education institutions with many of them offering multiple MT programs (10). These programs ranged from six months to three years and were offered by privately-operated or publicly-funded colleges at a diploma level. Programs are approved by their respective provincial ministries.

In regulated provinces, curricular requirements are influenced by the respective regulatory colleges through entry-to-practice competencies and exams. In 2013, the regulated provinces transitioned to the Inter-jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators, as a unified set of entry-to-practice knowledge, skills, and attitudes (11). This document was developed by a collaboration of the then three Canadian MT regulators and became the basis for entry-to-practice examination content and has undergone a revision (12). In unregulated provinces, voluntary-membership associations provide guidance regarding educational requirements with some setting requirements similar to those of regulated provinces or conducting their own entry-to-practice exams.

Until recently, there has been no form of programmatic accreditation for MT programs in Canada, other than in the province of British Columbia (BC). Within BC, the College of Massage Therapists of British Columbia accredited programs until 2014. Program in other provinces were either unaccredited or accredited by American organizations, such as the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA). After many years of discussion within the profession, a national effort involving the regulatory colleges, provincial association and other stakeholders resulted in an agreement to accredit MT programs through a third-party organization. In 2013,

the Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA) was created. The CMTCA has released draft accreditation standards and began accrediting Canadian MT colleges in February 2018.

The variety of institutions, regulatory situations, programs lengths and sizes suggest that national standardization will lead to different challenges. Accreditation is thought to benefit the profession of massage therapy by standardizing education quality, increasing practitioner mobility, and increasing access to resources for education institutions (10). Research by Menard (13) in the U.S. suggests positive outcomes of programmatic accreditation for MT programs including better value for students and decreased disciplinary actions against graduates.

This environmental scan was undertaken to create a point of comparison for the future state of MT education. By describing the challenges experienced by stakeholders, we will be able to monitor the impact of accreditation on the environment of Canadian MT education.

2. Materials and Methods

An approach described by Hodges et al. (14) in their seminal work on medical education was used to frame this study. This approach included interviewing stakeholders regarding the current state of MT education and analyzing their comments for common themes.

Participants

Purposive maximum variation sampling was used in which participants were selected so as to obtain a range of perspectives. A matrix was created to ensure representation across variables, including publicly-funded and privately-operated institutions, regulated and unregulated jurisdictions, instructors and administrators, and different regions of Canadian. Potential informants were identified through a literature review and an internet search. Individuals were asked to identify other potential participants at the conclusion of the interview.

Data collection

Interviews of approximately 45 minutes were conducted using a process described by Lincoln & Guba (15). An interview guide, based on issues and themes identified from the

literature review and input from the research team, was used. The interviews were taped and transcribed.

Analysis

The transcripts were coded using each participant statement as a unit of analysis. We began by reviewing the overall data and developing a categorization scheme. Each transcript was read in its entirety and coded for correspondence to the identified categories, while allowing for the emergence of new categories as data were analyzed in depth. One researcher coded all transcripts and members of the research team also coded one third of the transcripts independently. The results were compared to enhance the credibility and transferability of study findings. Once coding was completed, data reconstruction was used to develop themes.

Ethical Review and Consent

Ethical approval was provided by Humber College's Research Ethics Board. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Trustworthiness

To enhance credibility, multiple researchers participated in the analysis of the interview transcripts (LA, BS, SS). The initial analysis was done independently. Researchers then compared their results and reviewed any areas of disagreement. The research team engaged in peer debriefing on a monthly basis, which allowed for consensus decision making throughout the process. Transferability of the results is supported by the rich descriptions provided.

3. Results

Sixty-four key informants, from ten provinces were invited to participate in the study. Twenty-one massage therapy practitioners participated, all of whom had additional roles. Two were also part of a regulatory body, four were employed by or volunteers for their professional association, two were administrators in publicly-funded colleges, four were administrators at privately-operated colleges, three were instructors at publicly-funded colleges, and six were instructors at privately-operated colleges. Six provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba,

Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) were represented in the study. Sampling continued until our matrix was populated and data saturation was achieved. Three themes were constructed based on the participants' comments about challenges facing MT Education. They were: variation, isolation, and stagnation.

Sixty-four individuals, from nine provinces and one territory, were invited to participate. Twenty-one individuals participated. Two were part of a regulatory body, four were employed by or volunteered for their professional association, two were administrators in publicly-funded colleges, four were administrators at privately-operated colleges, three were instructors at publicly-funded colleges, and six were instructors at privately-operated colleges. Six provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island) were represented in the study. Four themes were constructed based on the participants' comments about challenges facing MT Education. They were variation, isolation, stagnation, and accreditation.

Variation

The theme of variation is described as the impact of differences in content and quality of the education provided in MT colleges. At times, this theme seemed inseparable from participants' experiences of variation within the profession. They described variation in the profession as a challenge for educators, as it made it difficult for them to know what should be included in the curriculum. Participants also described that variation in education creates variation in graduates and subsequently practitioners. "I think some of the issue is [lack of] consistency in the curriculum from college to college and from province to province. That [lack of] consistency in the education then reflects in the consistency of the product – which is the student or the future massage therapist." This cycle of increasing variation was of great concern.

Participants were asked to describe their overall perceptions of the current state of MT education. Many used words and phrases such as "in flux", "scattered", "at a crossroads", "all over the map", and "too chaotic". Some said that massage therapists in Canada are widely considered some of the best in the world, due, in part, to their education. With that said, there was unanimous agreement that MT education is currently undergoing significant change and

lacked standardization. The variation described included differences in privately-operated versus publicly-funded education programs, and differences between provinces; and it spanned the length of program, and preparation of instructors.

Variation between privately-operated and publicly-funded MT colleges. The wide variation in content and quality in MT programs was felt to stem, at least in part, from differences in privately-operated and publicly-funded education programs. Some shared that MT education originated in privately-operated colleges and has only recently been offered in publicly-funded colleges. Several participants, from both sectors, suggested that the privately-operated college sector was holding back MT education. Participants felt that too much education was taking place in privately-operated colleges. And while some 'legacy' privately-operated colleges have solid reputations, some of the more recently established privately-operated colleges do not. Participants felt that the privately-operated colleges that want to offer a strong program, also needed to operate a viable business and saw them as financially driven.

The challenge of how to get smaller, private, finance-driven institutions committed to excellence was expressed. Competition for students was identified as an important issue in Ontario, which was described as having too many colleges, all vying for the same students. One participant noted, "[Privately-operated colleges] set the instructors as competitors instead of [collaborators]. [In massage therapy], we see competition and a lack of sharing of resources." Privately-operated colleges were also seen as not providing education in the humanities or civics, which is part of the public education curriculum and considered by participants to be essential in helping students to think creatively and critically.

Limitations in the publicly-funded college system were also identified. Participants felt that there was a lot of unpaid work being done by part-time instructors. They shared that these instructors are not paid for lesson preparation and other out of class work. Participants felt this led to faculty turnover resulting in quality variation. Further, being part of a publicly-funded college meant that programs were constrained by those institutions' policies and procedures and were, therefore, less nimble in responding to change.

Some participants felt that “streamlining the number of institutions providing MT in a province might be helpful.” They described that some provinces had a “multitude” of programs and felt that diluted the quality of MT education. By limiting the number of colleges, they felt that would allow for the remaining programs to hire the best instructors to ensure the curriculum delivered was of the highest quality.

Variation between provinces. The regulatory status of the province was perceived to result in considerable variation in required program standards across the country. One participant commented, “There are four provinces that have the interjurisdictional competencies that bind us, then, it’s a bit of a wild west out there.” Variation in programs and standards was also reported to pose a problem regarding job mobility. When massage therapists move to a new province, expectations of practice held by the practitioner may differ from their clients’. “We know what a physiotherapist or a chiropractor does from province to province, but what a massage therapist does, and how they are licensed or regulated or what they practice, or even the definition of massage therapy is different across the country.” Participants shared that both massage therapists and the public have mixed perceptions. For some, massage therapists were healthcare professionals, for others they were service providers. MT was viewed by some as a profession with deep commitment to clients, while for others it was seen as quick certificate to a job. Participants suggested that this confusion and variation in perception is holding the profession back.

Variation in length of program. Participants felt that in the past, program quality was measured by program hours. They felt that the move to align curriculum with national competencies was a good one, however, program hours should not be dismissed. Neither competencies nor hours alone were a guarantee of quality education. Some participants reported that privately-operated colleges offered relatively short programs. “I’m very concerned when I see schools that are offering a massage therapy certificate and the ability to pass an entry-to-practice exam with a 6-month or an 18-month course.” Current students also want shorter programs, therefore, some colleges, wishing to be competitive, are under pressure to deliver the curriculum in a compressed amount of time.

Participants differed on whether the educational requirement at entry-to-practice should be a diploma or baccalaureate degree. Some felt that a baccalaureate degree was needed to develop the breadth of knowledge required for professional practice. Others felt that a MT degree should be offered, but not required for entry to practice, and that it was more important to improve existing programs before taking that step. “We need a degree program in MT, but more urgently [we] need to have a level playing field across the country.”

Participants were encouraged that universities were increasingly recognizing MT courses and awarding credit towards a degree. This includes increased articulation agreements between colleges and universities. A pathway to higher education was seen as a desirable next step for graduates.

Variation in instructor training. Another challenge, reported by the majority of participants, was the considerable variation in MT instructor training. Currently, there is no national standardized training or credentialing process for MT instructors. Instructors were described as “practitioner-teacher hybrids”. “You need to be an educator and have all of those tools and training and have the professional knowledge and tools. I think in our field, [we] often have a lot of therapists, and they mean well, but sometimes their teaching tools aren’t quite as well versed as their therapeutic knowledge.” Many have a strong background in MT practice with excellent therapeutic knowledge, however, they do not understand adult education principles to support excellence in teaching.

Participants suggested that there was a dearth of experienced, qualified instructors, which was emphasized by the rapid and continuous growth in MT colleges. Variation in instructor qualifications was also attributed to the differences in the privately-operated and publicly-funded education systems; the public system was viewed as setting higher standards for teaching and supporting instructor education. With one revenue stream, “private schools just don’t have the same resources or perhaps just don’t have the same sort of process that a community college would have for credentialing instructors.” Variation in instructors means that the quality of classroom instruction and instructional design may be affected.

Isolation

The theme of isolation is described as the feeling of the participant of being separated, or disconnected, from the regulator, accreditor, or colleagues due, at least in part, to a lack of communication or networking opportunities. This theme was thought to impact the ability of MT education to progress and innovate. Participants generally felt that sharing of resources and collaboration would be beneficial for programs, instructors, and ultimately, the student experience.

Feeling of being disconnected from the regulator. While appreciating the importance of regulation, and recognizing that regulators are driving the change that is building the profession, several participants who identified as instructors noted that MT regulators did not seem to appreciate the complexity of the education process. They felt that the regulators “operated behind closed doors” and often announced decisions affecting curriculum with little warning. Regulatory participants noted that some instructors and administrators became defensive when asked about a practice or audited to determine if standards were being followed.

Participants also noted the challenge of dealing with multiple regulators. One noted: We are regulated by the private training institute branch of the Ministry of Advanced Education in [one province]. They have regulations, and then the [regulatory body] is still the regulator in [the province], so they have requirements, and then the CMTCA is now our accrediting body. Dealing with all these regulatory bodies is quite costly, and sometimes the requirements that one has doesn't match what another ... requires.

The various ministries associated with MT education were seen as not working in harmony with the regulators. Lastly, a participant suggested that “there is a deep lack of trust between educators and regulators” and a sense that communication is only in one direction.

Feeling of isolation from colleagues. Many smaller colleges have a relatively small pool of instructors. These instructors have little opportunity to share teaching strategies and resources. For example, previous instructors may not pass on what they have created when the course is taught by a new instructor. “[When] I stepped into one of the courses that [I taught]

last year, I had nothing”. This lack of sharing of resources also means that each college is occupied with developing the learning resources and evaluation methods. Instructors reported the need to communicate and network with others to share strategies for preparing and succeeding with accreditation. National accreditation was seen as an opportunity for instructors and administrators to share practices and resources. Accreditation is discussed in detail below.

Stagnation

The theme of stagnation is described as a lack of activity, growth, or development within MT education. It was suggested that stagnation related to resources, content, and learning strategies. Participants often related limitations to change or improvement to bureaucratic momentum or red tape, a culture of resistance to change, and resource differences between programs and colleges of different sizes.

Outdated resources. An area of stagnation noted by participants was related to learning resources. One participant shared that “... there is a textbook on the [College of Massage Therapists of Ontario’s] list that is older than I am and I am 45!” It was suggested that the reason old texts are used in education programs is because these texts appear on the regulatory body’s list of resources used to inform the content of the entry-to-practice exams. Instructors feel obligated to use these texts, and consequently feel like they are teaching to the exam. In these instances, students are taught the information that may appear on an entry-to-practice exam at the expense of learning current evidence-informed content. A separate, but related, issue was that the selection of MT-specific textbooks is limited. Participants reported that instructors and developers used physiotherapy and occupation therapy texts when MT-specific resources were not available or lacked credibility. While physiotherapy and occupational therapy textbooks are useful, they were described as including information that was outside the scope of practice of massage therapists.

Lack of research for practice. A lack of commitment by programs to evidence-informed practice was identified as a challenge for MT education. Many participants noted that massage therapists should be held to similar standards as other health practitioners who are committed to evidence-informed practice. However, they felt that there was a research literacy gap in MT

curriculum in general. Some of this was attributed to the lack of research literacy of instructors. “We see a certain amount of unease with research and research translation and current best practices in manual therapy”. Participants were adamant that MT research is critical to support practice and to advance the profession. Further, some routine practices and techniques have recently been questioned as a result of recent research indicating that the curriculum is not evidence-informed in some areas. This gap has left instructors and practitioners feeling that they do not have a solid foundation in some areas.

Participants indicated that, in addition to the research literacy gap in the curriculum, there is a shortage of large scale, rigorous MT research to guide practice. Much of MT research is done by researchers outside the MT profession who view the study through a different lens. “When you start looking at crossover research, like physiotherapy, it is a very different lens that gets looked through”. This gap in research literacy and capacity was seen as a barrier to the development and implementation of evidence-informed curriculum.

Stagnation of teaching and learning strategies. Some participants reported that current students preferred to use technology in the classroom, which was seen as a challenge for professors not familiar or comfortable with emerging educational technology. The integration of technology was something to be managed by instructors, who might be unskilled in how to adapt learning strategies due to the lack of education-specific preparation described above. Participants felt that instructors need professional development as to strategies that would effectively engage current learners, such as online learning and simulation. Participants suggested some programs are still using older teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization instead of teaching students to access resources as needed and to apply critical thinking.

Accreditation

Participants talked about accreditation, both as a solution for some of the challenges previously mentioned, and a potential challenge in itself. The accreditation process, while viewed as a major undertaking, was described as “important and necessary”. It was thought to be able to address the main challenge reported by participants - the wide variation in curricula in programs across the country. “I think accreditation is going to help us make that

conversation and the language we use more similar across the country.” The majority of participants felt very positive about this initiative and were optimistic that accreditation would drive the standardization of MT education across the country.

Participants were hopeful that accreditation would help to align content and teaching practices. One noted, “It will enable us to look inwards again from a different way than we ever had before.” Viewing curriculum, teaching, and evaluation methods through a critical lens in preparation for accreditation was expected to improve quality in those domains.

Accreditation was expected to improve strong programs and potentially remove weaker programs. “I think accreditation [will have] a side benefit of maybe weeding out some folks who, once they really have to demonstrate that they are meeting certain requirements and standards, will not bother.” Accreditation, while potentially bringing benefits, will increase program costs. Costs may include the accreditation annual fee, the site visit fee, increases in staffing, and augmentation of student resources. Some participants suggested that some provinces and colleges are balking at regulation and accreditation for cost reasons, as considerable changes will have to be made regarding staffing, class sizes and student and instructor resources.

4. Discussion

Massage therapy education, like the profession, is at a crossroads. The genesis for this study was the impending implementation of national accreditation, which was clearly top of mind for these participants. The challenges facing MT education described by the participants mirrored challenges facing the profession of MT in general, so much so that, at times, it was difficult to separate the two.

The variation in MT education echoed the variation seen in the profession. Massage therapy is regulated in four provinces in Canada. While each of these provinces has a regulatory body to oversee the protection of the public and the standards of practice, each body operates under its provincial legislation which introduces variation at the foundation of the profession (1-4). With a slightly different scope of practice in these regulated provinces, the resulting education programs naturally include slight differences. The variation that begins with

scope of practice extends into standards of practice, which govern how massage therapists operate their practice and engage with patients. Whatever variation in practice that exists within regulated provinces is increased in provinces that are not regulated. Without regulation, there is nothing preventing the use of the term massage therapist. Similarly, there is also no educational requirement resulting in the opportunity for programs to determine the program details

As variation in MT education reflects variation in the profession, participants shared ideas regarding the many layers of isolation felt in their classrooms, programs, and institutions that mirrored the solitude of professional practice. Massage therapists often perform their work one-on-one with their patients with limited professional supervision or interaction with other therapists. Often, they practice in small clinics as contractors with few opportunities for professional exchange and limited venues for collective sharing. Massage therapists, through self-selection of profession and habitual practice, can develop a comfort with silence, communicating through their hands in their work and independent problem solving, which contributes to their sense of individualism and isolation (16). When these aspects of MT culture are extrapolated to the educational realm, they may affect massage therapists' relationships with each other, colleagues, other healthcare providers, and their professional institutions.

Isolation from colleagues can also result from precarious employment situations and perceived competition among instructors and between institutions. MT instructors are often part-time contractors with limited job security. This can lead to protectionist behaviours regarding curriculum content, teaching techniques, and course content. When this is extended to MT institutions, they may think it is advantageous to keep program content private limiting opportunities for exchange. Participants mentioned a recent educators' conference in Ontario as an example of a rare opportunity for exchange of ideas and training. Outside of Ontario, the limited number of institutions and their distribution across a country as large as Canada, may increase the challenge of holding and attending events that foster these types of broad exchange.

Isolation of educators from regulators may result from differences in perceived role, mirroring the dynamic between regulators and the profession, or for power dynamics related to authority. Regulators' primary role is that of providing parameters to the profession to protect the public interest and this extends to setting requirements for entry-to-practice education; the regulation of education is a secondary responsibility. This is further reflected in the role of other provincial education ministries in regulating MT institutions. As such, regulatory actions, such as providing clinical or ethical guidance, are primarily aimed at practitioners, leaving MT educators to interpret and apply these to their programs. The requirements of one regulatory layer may not match or be easily related to another. In addition, as the regulator may find itself in an adversarial situation with members of the profession, due to new requirements of practice or disciplinary actions, educators' views of their actions regarding education requirements may be coloured by their experiences as members of the profession. As with any authority that is responsible for specific requirements of others, regulators can be viewed as dictatorial, disconnected from the "reality on the ground" and unidirectional in their communication.

Most massage therapists work is individualistic with relatively little direct supervision or oversight by others; perhaps in part due to their usual employment status as contractors. Generally, they act independently in their clinical decision making, treatment planning, and other clinical activities. Treatment usually occurs one-on-one with their patients without observation by others. This level of independence may make the profession uneasy with external review and feedback. When this is extended to the education realm, instructors may be more prone to independent development of curriculum, course content, and content delivery. They may also be less familiar with supervisory rolls, the incorporation of feedback from others, and sharing with colleagues. Systemically, this may have been reflected in participants' sense of isolation from each other and other colleges. Individual approaches to program development more easily align with practitioner experiences and culture.

When discussing a sense of regulatory isolation, participants also suggested regulatory practice guidance, as found in curriculum and examination documents, did not reflect current research evidence. The incorporation of new learning in the sciences related to MT requires dialogue between researchers, clinicians, and educators. This is often fostered via networking

opportunities and social functions facilitated by conferences, seminars, and other profession focused events that allow for the exchange of ideas between instructors, institutions, and across geographic boundaries. Knowledge translation and integration of new learning into practice and its education is likely limited.

Massage therapy, like many health professions, faces barriers to the continued production of high-quality research applicable to practice including limited funding, few research-focused academic positions, and the profession's research culture (17). Research is often fostered within academic institutions and scholarly work at the masters and doctoral level. As entry-to-practice education in MT is a diploma, there may be limited opportunities for practitioners to transition to higher levels of learning resulting in the production of research. In addition, for those that do continue, there are no MT programs above the diploma level, leading to degrees in other fields and research generated that may not focus on the profession. The foundation then for the knowledge translation into the texts and curricula development tools used by educators is inherently limited by the research available. Other studies on the profession suggest that there are limitations in research literacy, awareness of current evidence, and research utilization in practice (18, 19). These limitations likely extend to instructors; particularly those who have not completed graduate or post-graduate education.

Institutionally, support for research and its integration into instruction, is provided through internal research funding, the provision of support staff, access to Research Ethics Boards, applied research centres, and other infrastructure. Smaller institutions are unlikely to be able to provide these along with the staff hours needed to generate and incorporate research evidence. As MT instruction is often provided by smaller privately-operated colleges, opportunity to generate and incorporate research evidence may also be limited. Given the limitations for each college, the isolation described regarding protectionist practices regarding sharing between instructors and colleges could contribute to stagnation.

When compared to medicine, participants here shared many similar concerns about stagnation in curriculum content, design, and educational methods (14). Echoed here are concerns with the incorporation of evidence and the suggestion of the need for increased basic

sciences content. While variations in resources were often ascribed to areas of specialization in medicine, these differences were associated here with college size and pressures related to profitability and competition. Also shared between scans was a participant sense of generational gap in expectations regarding technology. This suggests that solutions found in medicine education regarding content delivery may also serve some of the needs described by participants here.

At its core, accreditation of education programs is introduced to improve quality and standards. Participants described variation, isolation and stagnation as the main challenges facing MT education. They also described accreditation as a potential solution for these challenges. Quality can be set in an accreditation process as a minimum standard that must be achieved, or as a standard of excellence meant to stretch the educational program (13). Accreditation programs have the responsibility to ensure that the educational program offers quality in the student experience, programming according to a given standard, and adequate evaluation of that programming to ensure graduates are career-ready (20).

As the accreditation of MT programs in Canada has just begun, there is great opportunity for future research to explore the impact and quality of the accreditation process. This study sought to create a baseline description of the current challenges facing MT education. Once accreditation has been in place for several years, it would be worthwhile to revisit the study to see whether accreditation has had the intended impact and whether there were unforeseen benefits or additional challenges. Future research should consider multiple perspectives, perhaps adding the voice of the student and their view of challenges affecting their education.

5. Conclusion

An environmental scan was undertaken to create a point of comparison for the future state of MT education. Participants described three challenges they faced: variation, isolation and stagnation, which they hope would be remedied by recently implemented program accreditation. The themes that described the challenges faced by stakeholders mirror those of the profession. By describing the challenges experienced by stakeholders, we will be able to monitor the impact of accreditation on the environment of Canadian MT education.

6. Project Plan

Milestone	Person(s) Responsible	Deadline	Completed
Complete and submit Research Ethics Board application	Amanda Baskwill	Sep 28 17	Yes
Preliminary project meeting with Humber	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Oct 2 17	Yes
Receive REB approval	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Oct 13 17	Yes
Sign Project Agreement and supplementary agreements	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Nov 21 17	Yes
Research Assistant hired	Bryn Sumpton	Selected Dec 15 17, completed training Feb 27 18	Yes
Initial project team meeting	Bryn Sumpton	20 Nov 17	Yes
First three interviews completed	Janet Maher	Jan 12 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Jan 19 18	Yes
Initial interviews with draft thematic analysis	Lynda Atack	Jan 21 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Feb 2 18	Yes
Project team meeting	Bryn Sumpton	Feb 5 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Feb 16 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Mar 2 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Mar 16 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Mar 30 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Apr 13 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Apr 27 18	Yes
Completion of the rest of the interview	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton, Janet Maher	Previously Apr. 30 18,	Yes

		completed May 11 18	
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	May 11 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	May 25 18	Yes
Completion of data analysis		May 31 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Jun 8 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Jun 22 18	Yes
Team meeting	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Jun 30 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Jul 6 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Jul 20 18	Yes
Data webinar for participants	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Jul 31 18 Aug 17 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Aug 3 18	Yes
Project update	Bryn Sumpton	Aug 17 18	Yes
Finished research report	Amanda Baskwill, Bryn Sumpton	Aug 31 18	Yes
Submit final report to Humber; all project requirements complete	Amanda Baswill, Bryn Sumpton	Sep 15 18 Dec 10 18	Yes

An extension to the completion date has been requested in order to finish the manuscript for publication and final report, and to access fund for dissemination.

7. References

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