



Bulletin Number 3

An Introduction to Diversity

ISSUED MARCH 2005

Understanding diversity and developing related skills is important for health care professionals. The College of Massage Therapists of Ontario has established a diversity initiative as part of its Client Relations Program. This initiative will help massage therapists deal with the multicultural aspects of practice, provide quality care based on respect for the individual and, in some cases, may help prevent client abuse.

Defining Diversity

Diversity can be defined as the *significant differences amongst people*. This encompasses many things, including differences based on race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, nation of origin, class, religion, and learning and communication styles.

Each of these differences can affect clinical practice. Therefore, it is important that members develop diversity skills to deal with and understand the differences amongst their clients to prevent current and future discrimination and to increase access to massage therapy services by those individuals who traditionally have not sought out or received this care.

Benefits and Challenges of a Diversity Initiative

Discussion of diversity emphasizes differences in styles and ways of looking at and doing things. Understanding diversity can assist members in better meeting the needs of their clients by providing true “client-centred” health care.

Diversity presents challenges as the result of the “isms” that some members may be afraid to admit they share – these include racism, sexism, ageism and homophobia. These “isms” often prevent members from providing care to diverse groups and may cause misunderstandings as a result of cultural, behavioural or communication styles.

Developing Diversity Skills

Fundamental diversity skills include:

- **Respect** for others and for differences
- **Tolerance** for ambiguities in language, style and behaviour
- **Flexibility** with difficult or challenging situations
- **Self-awareness** to be sure you understand your own reactions and know what you bring to your practice
- **Empathy** to feel what someone who is different from you might be feeling in a new or strange environment
- **Patience** for change that can be slow
- **Humour** (when we lose our sense of humour, we lose our sense of humanity and perspective)

Looking Inward, Looking Outward

Members must be aware of those things in their own backgrounds that might either assist or prevent them from doing and seeing things that are important. Self awareness involves looking inward to explore issues such as how you were socialized, what your biases might be and what your individual values and perceptions are.

At the same time, understanding and respecting other peoples' different styles is crucial to being a good communicator with multicultural communities. To understand the differences in people, there is a need to look outward – to respect and appreciate a variety of communication

styles, backgrounds and values. This also involves developing good listening skills, being empathetic, and learning to read non-verbal communications.

Other competencies for understanding and effectively dealing with diverse groups include conflict resolution, team-building and leadership skills.

The College's Diversity Program

The Client Relations Committee is developing a Diversity Program to assist members in developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes about diverse groups. The expected outcome of this initiative will be the prevention of discrimination and an increase in the utilization of massage therapy by diverse groups. As part of this program, the College will produce additional bulletins focusing on the diversity competencies and will provide members with other tools to be used within their daily practice.



College of
Massage
Therapists of
Ontario

COLLEGE OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS OF ONTARIO

1867 Yonge Street, Suite 810
Toronto, ON M4S 1Y5

Phone: (416) 489-2626

Toll-free: (800) 465-1933

Fax: (416) 489-2625

E-mail: cmto@cmto.com

www.cmto.com