Today, the United States boasts more than a quarter million practicing massage therapists and students, and it’s been estimated that consumers spend between $6 to $11 billion annually on massage therapy. Learn more about the state of the massage industry and the role continuing education will play in the profession.

CONTRIBUTORS:
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Massage Therapy—A Healthy Industry

As more consumers turn to massage as an integral part of maintaining and improving their health, the number of people pursuing massage therapy as a profession has increased. To potential massage therapy practitioners, the industry landscape is attractive. According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, massage therapy is now a $6 to $11 billion a year industry and employment opportunities for massage therapists are likely to increase at a faster-than-average rate when compared to the growth rates of other occupations. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor projects job opportunities for massage therapists to increase by 21 to 35 percent by 2012. The AMTA 2005 Consumer Survey revealed that approximately 47 million Americans received a massage within the past 12 months, two million more people than in the previous year. The future looks promising for individuals who hope to make a career by practicing massage therapy.

While many massage therapists initially chose the profession to help their clients lead healthier lives, they often find their earnings potential is comparable to similar occupations in the health care field. According to the 2004 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics’ National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, the average annual reported salary (including tips) for a massage therapist who provides 15 hours per week of actual massage is $29,250, compared to $26,210 for full-time physical therapist aides, $28,140 for full-time physicians’ office workers, $34,780 for full-time recreational therapists, and $26,610 for other full-time health care support professions.

83% OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS ARE FEMALE, AND ON AVERAGE, ARE IN THEIR MID-40s, ACCORDING TO AN AMTA 2005 INDUSTRY SURVEY.
research & massage

With more health and medical professionals promoting the benefits of massage to their patients and supporting its practice in medical and health care settings, on-going research and clinical studies into massage therapy’s effectiveness for alleviating a number of medical conditions will only bolster this occurrence. To date, there are several studies of massage therapy’s positive effects for the following:

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Practicing massage therapy also offers practitioners unmatched flexibility to pursue their professional interests in a manner that best suits their overall goals, both professional and personal. According to an AMTA 2005 Industry Survey, most massage therapists chose massage therapy as a second career—an overwhelming 83 percent—citing the availability of a flexible schedule and potential for additional income as two important reasons for entering the profession after working in another area of work.

An AMTA 2005 Industry Survey also reports that the typical professional practices massage therapy approximately 15 hours each week of actual massage and earns an average of $39 an hour. For the majority of massage therapists, this flexibility creates an ideal environment. The AMTA Industry Survey also indicates that 55 percent would not want to work any more hours providing massage than they presently do. Massage therapy is a physically demanding profession that can limit the amount of hours a therapist can physically provide massage. With satisfied and fulfilled professionals, the massage therapy industry can be expected to grow as it attracts both more practitioners and more clients.

55% of massage therapists say they wouldn’t want to work more hours providing massage than they currently do, according to an AMTA 2005 Industry Survey. Massage therapists practice massage an average of 15 hours a week of actual massage.
The Value of Professional Competency & Excellence

For an industry with more than 80,000 nationally certified professionals, certification and testing are especially important. Organizations like AMTA are committed to ensuring that quality, performance and standards of integrity are applied to massage therapy.

But there is still much ground to gain if massage therapists are going to claim and keep their rightful place as true professionals marked by professional methods, character, standards and status. In recent years, an even greater emphasis has been placed on professional competency that encompasses education and training for massage therapists with the expansion of accreditation programs and continuing education classes.
“Continuing education is important to the advancement of the profession,” says AMTA President Mary Beth Braun. “It allows massage therapists to advance their careers by gaining additional skills and knowledge. It also enhances the professionalism and credibility of AMTA members while fulfilling AMTA’s commitment to provide the public with the highest quality of care.”

The Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA), recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, works with massage therapy schools and programs so massage therapists are trained to provide the highest quality of service to their clients.

According to a 2005 AMTA Industry Survey, a large majority—89 percent—of massage therapists take an average of 27 hours of continuing education classes per year. Practitioners can maintain and improve their skills through advanced training in specific modalities or for specific populations such as pregnant women, geriatric patients or athletes.

Certification is the result of an examination. By becoming nationally certified by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (NCBTMB), a

CONTINUED ON P.111
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Approved providers mean more and better options. John Page, executive director of NCBTMB, thinks he would be remiss if he didn’t try to alert massage therapists to the benefits of choosing an NCBTMB-approved provider. “By choosing a NCBTMB CE [continuing education] course from one of nearly 1,000 approved providers, you are assured that your course meets the requirements for re-certification.”

Choose continuing education that fits your needs. You can find classes in the mode that works for you—whether through a weekend seminar, online class or even through articles like the ones AMTA now provides in mtj and its online learning center (www.amtaonlinetraining.org).

how do you find the CE opportunities best suited for you?

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massage therapist must demonstrate baseline levels of education, experience, training, mastery of core skills, abilities and knowledge, and pass an exam.

When it comes to developing a professional reputation, NCBTMB Executive Director John Page suggests that massage therapists look to other health care professionals for guidance. "If you look at any profession regarded as more than a trade, there is a requirement for ongoing continuing education," Page says. "In fact, continuing education provides the basis for enhancing the professional abilities that are needed for that particular practice."

Not surprisingly, massage therapists’ overwhelmingly support educational standards and practices. In fact, according to an AMTA 2005 Industry Survey, 92 percent of massage therapists strongly or somewhat agree that there should be baseline education standards.

CONTINUED ON P115
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**Why pursue certification?**

One of the goals of the NCBTMB is to identify the value of certification, even for those who are not required to apply. Page says what certification offers is recognition of professionalism within the field. “Certification recognizes that you’ve had to maintain skills and competency through continuing education.”
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Widespread participation in continuing education means that the industry is well-equipped to meet consumer demands, but there remains a strong need for appropriate regulation of massage therapy. State regulation dictates that only those individuals having the state designation may provide massage therapy for pay or use a title indicating that they practice massage therapy. Currently, 36 states and the District of Columbia regulate massage therapists, up from 19 states and DC in 1995. As each state and many municipalities have different laws and/or requirements for regulating massage, many massage therapy professionals and organizations favor licensure requirements that eventually could be transferred easily from state to state.

Taking advantage of continuing education opportunities helps massage therapists make an investment in their professional development and keep up with the evolving nature of the profession. Additionally, continuing education helps enhance professionalism—and a professional reputation, professional knowledge and skills, and professional practice all help massage therapists ensure a long-term career in their profession.

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Page says that, “How other people perceive our profession will, in no small way, determine how they see those who practice within the profession.” Ongoing continuing education also transforms the public’s view of the industry. And Page notes, “If you want to continue to help clients with health care issues, then you need to make sure your profession is viewed positively.”

A Healthy Following
As more people receive massage more frequently, massage therapy promises to become more prominent in the lifestyles of Americans. According to the 2005 AMTA Consumer Survey, 34 percent of adult Americans received a massage within the past five years. Two million more people received a massage in 2005 than in 2004. While women consistently receive more massages overall (40 percent), 17 percent of men surveyed had a massage in the previous 12 months, up from 14 percent the previous year. Among all adult Americans, 73 percent would recommend massage therapy to someone else, demonstrating a high level of consumer satisfaction and confidence in its benefits.

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The 2005 AMTA Consumer Survey results show Americans most often choose to get a massage for medical reasons, relaxation and stress relief. Thirty-two percent of adults who received a massage in the last five years did so for medical purposes. Respondents listed muscle soreness and spasms, injury recovery and rehabilitation, and pain relief as common reasons to seek the services of a massage therapist. Twenty-six percent of consumers cited relaxation and stress relief as their reason for seeking massage therapy in the last five years. As more adults integrate massage therapy into their existing plans for overall health and wellness, these numbers are sure to increase.

**Massage in Many Settings**
In addition to massage being delivered at the massage therapist’s place of business and in a spa, massage therapy in the client’s workplace is also gaining in popularity, as more employers and employees recognize the benefits of massage and its value to the work environment. Massage therapy on the job can increase productivity and reduce stress. In one study from the Touch Research Institutes at the University of Miami, following a 15-minute chair mas-
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sage, employees increased their overall productivity for quantitative tasks and decreased the number of mistakes.

The implications for enhancing employee performance with massage therapy are promising, and many top companies are coming to this realization. A 2004 article in *mtj* reported that of the employers mentioned as the “100 Best for Working Mothers,” 77 percent offered massage therapy to their employees. Among the world’s leading corporations, General Electric, Hewlett-Packard, and Texas Instruments all offered massage therapy, with S.C. Johnson including it as a benefit to its employees for more than 10 years.

**The Medical Community Agrees**

Much like visiting a dentist or optometrist, massage therapy’s integration into routine wellness is aided by the support of the medical community. More than ever before, medical professionals and health care providers are encouraging their patients to seek massage therapy for certain medical conditions and to maintain good health. An AMTA 2005 Industry Survey found that 70 percent of massage therapists regularly receive referrals from health care providers.

83% OF MASSAGE THERAPISTS STARTED PRACTICING MASSAGE AS A SECOND CAREER, ACCORDING TO AN AMTA 2005 INDUSTRY SURVEY.

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care professionals, at an average of two referrals per month. Data from the 2005 AMTA Consumer Survey shows that 21 percent of American adults discussed massage therapy with their doctor or other provider, a significant increase from 14 percent in 2002. Among those who discussed massage with their provider, 60 percent said it was their physician who recommended that they seek massage therapy, 50 percent indicated it was their physical therapist and 38 percent their chiropractor.

Not only are health and medical professionals promoting the benefits of massage to their patients, but they also support its practice in medical and health care settings. According to a national survey conducted in 2003 by the Health Forum/American Hospital Association, 82 percent of hospitals offering complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies include massage therapy among their treatment offerings, and 70 percent of these utilize massage therapy for pain management and relief.

A Promising Outlook
The future will likely see more people entering the massage therapy profession, the public integrating massage therapy into their regular health routine and more evidence of the efficacy of massage in clinical trials and research. Consequently, there should be even more support for massage by the medical community and other health care professionals. Massage will be seen as a beneficial option for people suffering from pain, stress or injury and become an integral part of good health for all. The public will view professional massage as an important contribution toward wellness and a majority will receive massage on a regular basis.

SOURCES
2005 AMTA Consumer Survey
AMTA 2005 Industry Survey
Did you know?

A recent survey found that Americans are turning to massage therapy for reducing their stress and helping them relax. The survey, which polled 1,000 Americans and was sponsored by Brookstone, found that:

- **75 percent** of respondents will focus on taking better care of themselves and establishing a better work/life balance.
- **76 percent** of respondents said relaxation is very important to health and wellness.
- **73 percent** of respondents rated getting a massage as either extremely relaxing or very relaxing, compared to 51 percent who said exercise was extremely relaxing and 29 percent who reported opting for a glass of wine or a cocktail was extremely relaxing.
- **69 percent** of respondents agreed that regular massage therapy is an important part of overall physical health and well-being.
- **52 percent** of respondents would like to receive a massage product or service as a gift.

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