

Legislation that would regulate massage therapy in Sask. gets mixed reviews

BY NATASCIA LYPNY, LEADER-POST AUGUST 31, 2015 8:04 AM



Massage therapist Dianne Fraser in one of the therapy rooms at Advance Therapeutic Massage Clinic in Regina on Aug. 28, 2015. (BRYAN SCHLOSSER/Regina Leader-Post)

Photograph by: BRYAN SCHLOSSER, Regina Leader-Post

Draft legislation floating around for massage therapists in Saskatchewan is getting mixed reviews.

The Massage Therapist Association of Saskatchewan (MTA S), which has 800 members, has been aiming to regulate the profession for years. This spring, the Ministry of Health finally released a draft Massage Therapy Act, influenced in part by MTA S recommendations.

The ministry and MTA S executive director Lori Green agree the primary purpose of regulation is the protection of the public.

"There's nothing guaranteeing to the public who is and who is not a massage therapist," Green said.

"As massage moves far more into health care, there's more need to ensure that the therapist you're seeing is educated."

Legislation means the creation of a regulatory college, which would require practitioners demonstrate they have met certain educational standards and passed an exam to register. Only members of the college would be able to refer to themselves as "registered massage therapists."

The college would also address complaints and disciplinary procedures. Currently, there is little to prevent a massage therapist from practising.

Finally, regulation would provide college members with labour mobility for the four other regulated provinces.

Although Green said she has received "very positive" response from MTAS members on the legislation, she added, "I think there's a lot of fear that is out there."

Much of that uneasiness is coming from non-MTAS massage therapists.

"The majority of our members in Saskatchewan are not opposed to regulation, but there are a couple of things in the current draft that we and our members do have some concerns about," said Kelly Sloan, executive director of the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada, which has 560 members in Saskatchewan. Unlike MTAS members, who under the draft legislation will likely be grandfathered into the college, NHPC members and members of other associations might have to take an entry exam.

"Having to take time off to prepare for an exam when they've already proven their competency doesn't make sense to us," said Sloan.

NHPC member Katja Wynnyk, who works at Regina's Wascana Remedial Massage Centre, agreed that, "I honestly think it's a good idea to be registered, (but) you can't start leaving people out and leaving people behind just because they're not a part of your specific organization."

Sloan said the college entry criteria should be determined based on a multistakeholder consultation

process.

Green said the exam will cover basic competency and should not require time off to study. The college would likely conduct prior learning assessments for certain cases as well, which might allow some people to be grandfathered in without taking the exam. "First and foremost, no government is going to proclaim anything that could put people out of work," said Green. "I don't think that would be a government's intent, and it's certainly not the intent of MTAS to stop anybody who is eligible and competent to practise."

Dianne Fraser doesn't deny the legislation is "controversial" in massage therapy circles, but she thinks it's "great" and a "long time in coming."

Fraser, who works at Advance Therapeutic Massage Clinic in Regina, said regulation "brings us on par with physiotherapists and occupational therapists and dentists and doctors, and I think that's what the public is looking for."

She pointed to the influx of massage parlours in Saskatchewan, and said it's not always clear what services they are offering or the credentials of those who work there.

Support isn't just coming from massage therapists; insurers are also on board. The Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association has voiced its support as regulation establishes a set of standards, and helps insurers clarify which services are covered, said director of health and dental policy Joan Weir.

Despite the "high level of comfort with the legislation as it's currently proposed," said Ministry of Health representative Duane Mombourquette, the government will not be introducing the document in the legislature's fall sitting. It is opting, instead, to do more consultations.

"We just want to make sure that we get this right as we go forward," he said.

Sloan is pleased to see the government taking this approach.

While Green said MTAS has plans to consult other organizations, she is "disappointed" the legislation has "taken so long."

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