

# Stay Fresh with Continuing Education

by Brandi Schlossberg

One key to a vibrant life is to continue on the quest for new knowledge. When we stop pushing ourselves to learn, grow and adopt fresh information, our daily routines can become stagnant and perhaps even a little bit boring.

Fortunately, in the field of massage therapy, continuing education is not only a popular pursuit, it's also a requirement among licensing bodies and professional associations, on both state and national levels.

For instance, the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB), a nonprofit organization that has certified more than 88,000 massage therapists and bodyworkers, requires 48 hours of continuing education every four years. Six of these hours must be in ethics, two of which must address roles and boundaries.



Bodywork and Massage Professionals (ABMP) mandates 16 hours of continuing education every two years for its certified members.

The quantity and quality of continuing education a massage therapist must receive depends on a number of variables, including the state in which she practices, whether she is NCBTMB certified, whether she is a member of AMTA, ABMP or another association, and perhaps all of the above.

If you practice in a state that regulates massage, check with the state board first to find out exactly how many hours of continuing education you need and whether the courses must be approved by

the board or the NCBTMB.

Aside from meeting requirements, continuing education is a wonderful way to keep your career fresh and steer it in new directions.

For instance, if you're looking to build your client base, you may wish to expand your menu of modalities to appeal to more people. If you seek employment in a doctor's office or hospital, classes on medical massage would be a good idea. If

opening your own practice is the goal, consider courses that focus on business. And if you're beginning to feel burned out, try learning a less-demanding form of bodywork.

When it comes to enrolling in continuing education, massage therapists have plenty to think about. Is the school that's offering the course NCBTMB or state approved? Which is the better investment—a big-name

presenter or a smaller specialty class? Is it best to take continuing education online or on-site?

If a continuing-education provider has been approved by the NCBTMB, it means the provider has submitted an application to a peer-review committee, expressing his or her commitment to a code of conduct and describing the course, its expected outcomes, the teaching methodology and the time frames for learning.

As for whether to go with a big-name presenter, such courses are prone to both pros and cons.

"One of the pros is accessibility—they travel to me, mostly," Delaporta said. "They are usually presenting subject areas that are more recognizable by the public, and therefore, more often requested."

A downside of such classes is that a large number of attendees in a large venue could mean students interact with assistants, not presenters, which may feel less valuable.

Choosing between online and on-site continuing education is a highly personal decision, and it depends on the massage therapist's learning style and goals, as well as the course topic.

Distance education is accepted by the NCBTMB and many state boards, and this type of training is especially handy for the time-strapped or remote massage therapist. However, certain courses—and students—fare far better in a hands-on environment.

"Only the individual practitioner can decide this," Delaporta said. "Some subject areas—specifically technique-rich, kinesthetic-based offerings—are better suited to in-person presentation."

One final consideration is payment. If you're self-employed, the classes could be tax-deductible. If you work for someone else, find out if your employer would be willing to pay for all or part of your tuition. In addition, discounts may be offered if you purchase course packages or combinations.

Since continuing education is required in one form or another for the majority of massage therapists, it's assured that members of this healing field will have the impetus to keep growing—and increasing the value of their hands-on offerings.

*For more information on continuing education for massage-therapy graduates, professionals and employers, please contact Cortiva Institute's Director of Continuing Education Patrick Pheasant at (201) 215-6329, ppheasant@cortiva.com or visit www.cortiva.com/ce.*

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