



Scope of Practice Guide

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to help Registered Massage Therapists (RMTs) understand their scope of practice, determine the professional services they are able to perform, and choose appropriate professional development activities.

Rationale for this guide

MTANS members must be knowledgeable about their scope of practice as they are accountable for the care they provide to the public. This guide is being provided to assist and support the profession in understanding and working within their Scope of Practice. This guide should be used in conjunction with the Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, MTANS policies and guidelines, any applicable legislation, and when relevant, employer policies. If, after reviewing this document, RMTs are still unsure whether a particular task, modality, or skill set is within their scope, they should contact MTANS for further guidance.

What is a Scope of Practice?

A scope of practice is a broad statement that defines what a Massage Therapist is permitted to perform in practice and sets boundaries for RMTs to work within. An individual RMT's scope of practice may differ somewhat from others within the profession, as professional development may lead them to become more skilled in certain areas. However, the scope of practice of an individual RMT may **not** exceed the scope of practice of the profession. Additionally, when a modality falls within the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy, the individual Massage Therapist must have the required level of education, certification, and necessary liability insurance to perform the modality. For example, a massage therapist who is new to the profession does not have the same skill set, and therefore will not have the same scope of practice, as someone who has taken advanced training in lymphatic drainage. In both cases, RMTs with entry level skills in lymphatic drainage and with advanced skills, each still practises within the scope of practice for the profession.

Massage Therapy Scope of Practice

*The practice of massage therapy is the assessment of the soft tissues and joints of the body and the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction and pain of the soft tissues and joints by **manipulation** to develop, maintain, rehabilitate, or augment physical function, or relieve pain.*

Application of the RMT's skill set should be determined through the 'contextual' lens of the Scope of Practice, Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, and Association policies and guidelines. Due to the fact that much of the general health-care knowledge, assessment methods, and treatment modalities incorporated by an RMT in practice are utilized by other health-care professionals, it must be acknowledged that it is not the name or "type" of modality that dictates how the intervention is classified; instead, it is the intended outcome and context for the provision of that intervention. For example, when an RMT provides muscle energy technique within the Scope of Practice of massage therapy, this modality is considered massage therapy. If the same modality is provided by an Osteopath within their scope of practice and treatment plan, it is osteopathy (likewise with physiotherapy, chiropractic, etc.).

Competencies within scope

Competencies include the knowledge, skills, and professional judgement required to perform safely and ethically under the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy. The Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FOMTRAC) have developed a document called the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators (PCs/Pis). It defines entry-to-practice competencies and informs the curriculum for massage therapy education programs. These are the minimum competencies a Massage Therapist requires to maintain a safe level of practice and should always be considered when assessing whether a modality is in scope and when choosing professional development activities. RMTs should become familiar with this document.

Entry-to-practice competencies include:

- Professional practice (communication, professionalism, therapeutic relationship);
- Assessment; and
- Treatment (treatment principles, massage techniques, therapeutic exercise, thermal applications).

“Following entry-to-practice, a Massage Therapist’s competencies will continue to evolve based upon increasing experience, ongoing learning from colleagues, and professional development activities. Levels of proficiency in frequently-used competencies may be expected to increase;

new competencies may be learned; levels of proficiency in competencies that are not regularly used may decrease. In general, over the span of a career, the massage therapist will move beyond entry-level (novice) practice towards more mature practice levels.” (Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, 2016, p. 5)

Summary of restricted activities

There are certain activities and controlled practices which are **not** permissible in the profession of massage therapy and MTANS Scope of Practice. These items should not be conducted within a massage therapy treatment and their use may result in disciplinary action for operating outside of scope. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

- Performing a treatment modality or technique that is not approved as massage therapy or does not fall under the scope of the profession and billing it as massage therapy;
- Prescribing and administering medication or providing nutritional or medication counselling (e.g., vaccination, vitamins, supplements);
- Providing a diagnosis and/or suggesting that a therapeutic intervention can provide a cure for a disease or syndrome;
- Puncture of the dermis (e.g., acupuncture, dry needling);
- Performing all forms of psychotherapy, mental health counselling, talk therapy, bodytalk, or spiritual counselling;
- Providing advice on areas outside the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy (e.g. the client’s mental, financial, nutritional, or social health) unless in the form of a referral;
- Inserting equipment or body parts into the ear canal, anus, vagina, urethra, beyond the uvula, and massage of the genitals;
- Resetting or attempting to treat a broken bone or joint;
- High velocity, low amplitude joint mobilization (i.e., Grade 5 joint mobilizations);
- Complementary and alternative therapies (e.g., energy work, self-affirmation, herbal remedies); *Except Level 1 Reiki* - please refer to the MTANS Position Statement on Complementary Modalities.

***Please note:** the practices of Traditional Chinese Medicine and osteopathy, amongst others (i.e., physiotherapy, chiropractic, etc.), are treatment philosophies and approaches to care which are outside the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy and are addressed in the MTANS Dual Health Profession Policy.

Scope of Practice and Professional Development

Historically, MTANS has maintained a list of modalities for RMTs to offer guidance for working within scope and choosing continuing education activities. These quickly become outdated as evidence-based knowledge accumulates, and modalities are either added or removed. Additionally, questions may remain as to whether a modality is within scope. For modalities not appearing on the current lists, we have provided a framework below for guidance for MTANS members.

This framework lists essential questions RMTs should ask themselves when choosing a treatment modality and/or PD activity. These questions are intended to assist RMTs in determining if activities are consistent with the Massage Therapy Scope of Practice and whether the activity will enhance knowledge and client care. Answering negatively to any of the questions does not necessarily mean that the modality or competency cannot be added, but it may mean additional consultation is required with MTANS.

Scope of practice:

- Does it support the assessment, treatment, and manipulation of the soft tissues and joints of the body?
- Is the aim of the use of this modality to develop, maintain, rehabilitate, or augment physical dysfunction or relieve pain?
- Does it promote the prevention of physical dysfunction of the soft tissues and joints?

Standard of practice:

- Can I comprehensively obtain informed consent from clients for this modality (i.e., Can I explain the risks, benefits, side-effects, etc., to clients sufficiently for them to make an informed decision)?
- Can this modality be applied in a manner that is fully compliant with the standards of practice for massage therapy?
- Can I assess the health outcomes of the use of this modality?
- Can I appropriately limit the risk of harm to my client when using this modality?
- Is this modality being provided within a massage therapy treatment plan?

Code of Ethics:

- Is this appropriate to apply according to the ethical principles established by MTANS's Code of Ethics?
- Do I have the training and skills needed to safely provide this modality?
- Is the use of this modality in the client's best interest?
- Is the modality being provided within the framework of client-centred care?

Evidence-informed practice:

- Is there evidence to support the use of this modality for this client and their health needs? This includes, but is not limited to, currently accepted theory in anatomy and physiology.
- What is the likely mechanism of action for this modality, and does it align with Scope of Practice?

When further consultation is required

- After having consulted the above decision-making framework, it is still not clear whether a modality is within the Scope of Practice of Massage Therapy; and/or
- When there is a concern/question about the potential risk to clients.

Key points

- Scope of Practice is not a skills list. It is the knowledge, skills, and professional judgment required to practice safely and ethically within the Scope of Practice for the profession.
- All MTANS members must work in a manner that is consistent with relevant legislation, Scope of Practice, Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, policies and guidelines.
- Determining if a modality falls within the RMT Scope of Practice requires analysis using critical thinking, professional judgement, and possible consultation with the PD Committee and MTANS Board of Directors.

Relevant documents

- Code of Ethics
- Dual Health Profession Policy
- Professional Development Policy
- Standards of Practice

References

- Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada. (2016). Inter-jurisdictional practice competencies and performance indicators for Massage Therapists at entry-to-practice
- Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network (2016). Network decision-making framework: Scopes of practice