

## **What do labels mean?**

Why Advanced Certification is so important.

Labels are an integral part of our day to day lives and are present everywhere in our society. We put labels on everything from the proverbial soup to nuts... to food, cars, clothes, technology and our professions. They come in all sorts of verbiage like... new, improved, low fat, non-fat, high energy, organic, best buy, 4G, HD, high-speed, high performance, energy-efficient and so on and so forth. As we know, there are some that have value and others do not. As consumers, we want to make the most informed decision possible, get the best value for our dollar, and when appropriate, hopefully consider larger global effects of our choices. But, it's not always so easy to know what labels are true / honest and which are simply sugar-coating.

In our bodywork profession, we have all sorts of initials to designate what product we are selling; NCBTMB, MBLEx, NMT, CSR, MFR, MLD and of course Certified. Do these labels hold value or are they sugar coatings? With these types of labels, there are some that will hold value with the public at large and within the profession itself, and in other cases, the initials are bandied about like candy, sweet to the eyes and mouth but can cause decay in the profession.

So...What do labels mean anyway?

Often, when we are assessing what something is, first we have to look at; what it is not. Here is what I think labels do not mean.

Let me ask you a simple question, would you want to go to a therapist for treatment in a certain modality who spent 4hrs learning and studying the material, or a therapist who had to put in maybe 10 times that amount of time into their study? Easy question, right? So why is it, that we see so many therapists across all fields and specifically our own profession of bodywork doing just this? They attend a one day workshop and decide that they now 'own the material' and can add it to their credentials.

How does it make you feel, when you truly own the material due to diligent course work and study, to see a colleague perform this unethical practice and devalue your credential? Yes, I said unethical. Just because I can teach A&P doesn't mean I can advertise that I can perform open heart surgery. Heck, I know where the valves, chambers and ventricles are located, so maybe I could pull it off. Hmmm, maybe an extreme analogy, but it gets the point across.

This problem has become so widespread that some doctors, physical therapists and chiropractors, have all commented to me, that they have stopped referring their patients/clients for massage therapy for therapeutic massage due to this rampant problem. These other health professionals don't trust massage therapists because of the false advertising of our credentials. This is extremely concerning to our profession, were bodywork professionals have worked hard for decades to up the level of the profession, to then see our growth stunted by such unscrupulous practices.

Our profession of massage and bodywork has become so watered down with 4 hr and 1 day courses that it gives the new student or sometimes seasoned professional a false sense of being competent. After a 4 hr course in a modality that typically takes tens if not hundreds of hours of study to own the material, is the therapist

truly competent in the modality? Now this is not just the therapist's creation, it is the educators offering programs and giving the students a false sense of competency and a label to go with it.

You may note that I offer one day programs to some topics to introduce students to a field of study. Is there anything wrong with introducing a student or practitioner to a modality, which is typically a large commitment of time and money, with a 4 hr or one day workshop? Absolutely not, as long as there is an understanding, that the course is an introduction and not a license to print and advertise complete competency in the modality. This is why I also offer complete Certification programs approved by the NCBTMB in the modalities that I teach as introductory courses, so if students feel compelled, they can choose to further their education, within the subject matter of the introductory courses, with a more encompassing program.

This is the very purpose of Continuing Education; we build systematically upon a foundation of knowledge to attain a higher level of skill in a certain modality until we attain a level of proficiency that affords us the *privilege* of adding it to our credentials.

I think it is time that NCBTMB or other accreditation agency take a leadership role in creating a standard for certification in therapeutic modalities of bodywork. In doing so, curriculum levels have to be set and reviewed so that all continuing educators are responsible to meet a certain educational standard and content. There needs to be some standard set to separate true therapeutic therapists from other forms of massage. It maybe time for us to have "Certified Medical Massage Therapists" , were therapists can attain a certain level of continuing education to then be eligible to sit for a board exam in the advanced field.

Having higher standards will only strengthen our profession in the eyes of other healthcare professionals, and give clarity to the consumers, so they can make an educated choice based on their individual needs. Do they want to relax and be pampered, or do they have plantar fasciitis and they need a highly educated and skilled treatment for their ailment.

No one wants more regulation, but I think we can learn from the example of the 2007/2008 economic collapse... When we have lack of regulation, it can lead to poor quality of services and diminish consumer protection. Unfortunately, we as human beings have very strong hardwired emotions that can govern our actions even against our own principles; fear, power, greed and the need to succeed at any cost can taint our best intentions. I am not damning anyone for this deep seeded emotion. I am no different than any other human being, for at times of my life, I to have been guilty of these same emotions.

Responsibility is called for in our profession, whether it is regulation by an agency or not. This has to include everyone from the professional educators offering continuing education courses, to the therapists looking to expand their skill level. We all want to make sure our credentials stand for something and don't fall to the level of just another Label... Like... new, greatest and improved.

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