



MTI Board Update May 2020

Covid-19 – Settling into the Unsettled – Return to Work

When the government enables massage therapists to return to work it will be necessary to examine all the variables and ask ourselves these questions on a personal level:

- How has our community been affected?
- What is the level of testing in our community?
- Who is at home, and how vulnerable are they should they become infected?
- What is the physical and psychological cost of reopening our practices?

These are uncomfortable questions to answer, yet fundamental ones to enable an honest appraisal of our working landscape.

I have been thinking about what our business would look like and with the greater massage community have reflected on the following based on collation of international perspectives:

- Temper our expectations—it may be a while before we're fully up and running again. Use this time to update cancellation policies, waiting room layouts, booking programmes, and language changes for your website and materials.
- Come back slowly—see what challenges you encounter with the new working protocols and what areas to improve. Staggered appointment times and greater time necessary for cleaning protocols might mean you'll need to rethink your daily schedule and the number of clients you can see. Think about your hours of operation.

- In accordance with extended shelter-in-place recommendations to protect our more vulnerable populations, you may only be able to work with clients who are in lower risk categories for COVID-19.

We understand there is a fine line between getting back to work and earning an income and protecting our safety and the safety of our clients.

We offer these initial guidelines as a starting point for a safe and professional return to work:

- Face masks to be used in treatment rooms to help prevent the spread of COVID-19; it may be encouraged that both the therapist and the client wear a face covering.
- Following stringent sanitation protocols between each client is critical. Use disinfectants on all surfaces, doorknobs, chairs, etc., that a client might have touched.
- Change all linens, fleece blankets, and perhaps your clothes between each client. Possibly not using cloth/linen at all? Should all surfaces be wipeable? Use gloves where practical.
- Stagger client appointments or text them when they can come in so there is no more than one client at a time in common areas. Make sure you have ample time to prepare for, and take care of, each client and your work area.
- Be transparent—in your reminder phone call, on your consultation form, even when clients arrive for their appointment. Ask them: Have you had a fever in the last 24 hours of 38 Celsius or above? Do you now, or have you recently had, any respiratory or flu symptoms, sore throat, or shortness of breath? Have you been in contact with anyone in the last 14 days who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or has coronavirus-type symptoms? If they answer yes, then ask them to reschedule, without penalty. You may wish to include questions around anosmia (loss of smell) as well.
- Live your words—do the same that you ask of your clients. Let them know how you are feeling and err on the side of caution. They are just as concerned as you are.

- Set expectations for your client; let them know there is a “new normal” in your practice (e.g., limiting your “table talk”). Let them know safety is an important element of your therapy.

Many are now settling into new ways of earning, working and developing avenues for sustained income. As we do, we need to ask ourselves the question:

Is massage therapy still a leading priority for many of our clients?

Again, this is an opportunity to ask the question HOW is it a leading priority for our clients – and to be able to build and re-emphasise the rationale for receiving treatment with our clients; and strongly underpin the reasons for treatment and hands-on therapy – whether it is pain relief, symptom reduction, anxiety management or other.