

COVID-19 and Massage Therapy: First Do No Harm

In the past couple of months, COVID-19, popularly referred to as coronavirus, has been the main focus of the news media. It's not the first pandemic in the world, but it may be the first in our lifetime that has had such a widespread effect on our own soil, and on massage therapists. In the 21 years of my own practice of massage, this is the first time that someone's illness other than my own, or that of a client, has caused a disruption of business. Many states are shutting down all non-essential businesses, including massage therapy, and in some places, mandating shelter-in-place or stay at home orders, in an effort to contain the spread of the virus.

I tried to get the message across about shutting down for a couple of weeks before our governor ordered it. So did respected author and educator Ruth Werner, whose [letter about it appears on the ABMP website](#), and other educators and therapists that I respect and admire.

We are obligated to *first do no harm*. In spite of that, social media is full of therapists arguing that massage is an essential service. Claims I've personally seen include "My clients will be suicidal if they cannot see me." "The hospital will be full of my clients if they can't get their massage." "Obviously, you've never done medical massage, or you would know that it's absolutely necessary." "This virus is just trendy." The amount of ego and lack of being client-centered in these statements is astounding.

This is not a dress rehearsal for a disaster; *it is* a disaster. The U.S. is now leading the world in cases of COVID-19. Some therapists are convinced that they are of the same importance in this life-and-death situation as physicians, nurses, and other front-line responders who are bravely putting themselves at risk in order to treat the sick. Many hospitals are facing shortages of enough tests, supplies, and equipment to go around.

We have to be realistic about where we fit in. It's true that we are licensed under healthcare statutes in some states, but we have to be mindful that even where that is the case, we are not *essential* front-line responders. We are not saving lives. *No one is going to die without a massage.*

When this is over, your clients will remember that their safety was your first concern, and they'll be back. Even if your state hasn't mandated it, I urge you to stop now. Just do the right thing: *first do no harm*.