

Weekend Workshop Syndrome

One of our obligations as licensed massage therapists in most regulated states is continuing education. The requirement is intended to foster continued learning and growth, that we may improve our knowledge and competence in the practice of massage therapy. Education is a great thing. Some people resent the requirement, but personally I enjoy attending classes, as well as online learning, and usually wind up with more hours than I need for license renewal. We need to remember the most important obligation of being a massage therapist: *first do no harm*.

Weekend Workshop Syndrome (sounds like an actual disease, doesn't it?) occurs when we attend a few hours of continuing education and come out ready to represent ourselves as an expert in the subject matter. That also applies to entry-level massage school; a few hours touching on a subject doesn't make anyone proficient in it. As Nina McIntosh stated in the original version of *The Educated Heart*, it gives fresh meaning to the phrase, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

We practice massage—*practice* being the key word. When you attend a hands-on workshop, you're usually trading with the same partner, or maybe a few partners, over the course of a few hours or a few days. The people you're trading with may not have the actual dysfunction or condition you're learning how to work with. What you learn in a few hours, or a few days is usually rudimentary; some work requires attendance at a series of workshops in order to become a practitioner. Even then, regular use of the knowledge and techniques learned must be applied in your real-life practice to really gain expertise.

Clients sometimes come along that we don't have the knowledge or skills to work with; for example, people in a fragile state of health from cancer or other life-threatening illness, or someone with a condition that we know little or nothing about. The general public is unfamiliar with contraindications and cautions for massage therapy, which is why we have to be. The public, and unfortunately some massage therapists, don't understand that massage, or certain techniques, or something as simple as the amount of pressure, may be inappropriate for their condition. The responsibility is ours to *first do no harm*, to always put the client's safety first, and to refer out to someone with appropriate training when necessary.