



Spa Therapist Education: Time to Invest

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Have you ever wondered how well qualified your spa therapist is who manipulates your soft tissues?

During a recent visit to the dentist, I had a disturbing thought. "How would I feel if I found out that the dentist had received very little training to be working in my oral cavity?"

In many countries, spa therapists undergo between 700 and 3000 hours of training, before they can be licensed to deliver a massage. Globally, this varies and is dependent on the countries' legislation. In Thailand, if you have a massage in a hotel or resort spa, it is probable that the person twisting and stretching your spine may have received substantially fewer hours of training.

In April 2004 the Thai Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) made it mandatory for spa therapists to undergo a minimum of 60 hours of training in an MoPH-approved massage school in Thailand. In the future this is likely to be increased, as Thailand is eager to

maintain its status as "Spa Capital of Asia". In line with the international Spa Industry, Thailand has seen remarkable growth over the last ten years, making Thai spa services and products attractive to a global audience. This growth is mainly due to the legendary Thai service and hospitality, the stunning architecture and the integration of natural scenery as opposed to the therapeutic quality of the treatments offered.

To sustain this growth it is important to monitor some significant indicators that signal the need to progress spa therapist education to a higher level internationally. So let's review some of these indicators.

Increased sophistication of spa guests – Many spa guests will have experienced treatments and services in their home country and will expect similar or better standards in the "Spa Capital of Asia".



The quality of the guest experience is directly related to the quality of training a therapist receives.

However, the pricing strategy of many hotel and resort spas appear to rival that of their counterparts in London, Frankfurt, Sydney or Denver.

The need for differentiation – In an increasingly competitive market, menu and treatment design have to go beyond adding a few trendy treatments. Clients will be attracted to those spas that truly offer authentic and effective treatments that positively influence their well-being.

Increased awareness of spa therapists – Spa Therapists are becoming increasingly aware of how they can influence the quality and outcome of a treatment. Thorough knowledge of human anatomy, application of healthy body mechanics, breathing techniques and the way to connect with a client's physical and emotional needs, energy and body, are all topics that spa therapists are eager to learn more about.

All of these indicators suggest how vital it is to invest in more comprehensive, professional spa therapist education. Whilst a dentist must have relevant medical knowledge to decide on the best treatments, so too must professional spa therapists who need thorough knowledge of the body, and how their work impacts on their client's body, energy and emotions. This knowledge should include:

- Anatomy & Physiology
- Palpatory literacy
- Range of authentic massage modalities
- Pathology
- Energy, healing and the power of touch
- Intention, presence and connection
- Nutrition
- Application of healthy body mechanics
- Guest care and work ethics
- Assessment and communication skills

For the guest's experience to be positive the therapist must feel confident. Confidence is derived from knowledge and understanding; knowledge and understanding is developed through a positive learning experience. So it

will be good to know that your spa therapist has not simply learnt a sequence of treatment steps through memorizing information.

To develop this foundation of skills and knowledge, spa therapists need to invest in four to six months of effective training before learning the treatments offered in their spa.

EFFECTIVE TRAINING IN A SPA THERAPY ENVIRONMENT:

- Is highly interactive
- Ensures spa therapists practise on models to evaluate their standards
- Includes practice hours and teaching hours in fair balance
- Is knowledge-based and cross-referenced to Anatomy and Physiology
- Connects theory with practical skills
- Develops the spa therapist through regular feedback
- Challenges the spa therapist intellectually and practically
- Is supported by international certification such as CIBTAC, ITEC or BABTEC making the industry more attractive to people choosing their future career

Without this training, spa therapists will feel unprepared to cater for the increasing expectations and sophistication of their discerning spa guests.

With this training, everyone wins. Spa guests will experience better and more effective treatments with lasting impact. Therapists will feel more confident and enjoy their work more. Spa operators will see more satisfied guests who will become ambassadors for their spas, which will in turn lead to repeat, and increased business.

So, the next time you select a spa for your treatment, you may want to find out what education your therapist has had to deliver your treatment. Spa operators who genuinely care about your well-being will know that it is time to invest and have already started to make this investment with their therapists. **sa**

Increased focus on competence of Spa Therapist – Spa guests need to feel confident that their spa therapist is able to ask about, discuss and utilize relevant medical information in order to customize treatments to meet their personal needs.

Focus on well-being against pampering – Many passionate spa-goers are keen to adopt healthier lifestyles and expect spa therapists to be able to give treatments with therapeutic impact, as well as advice on exercise, nutrition and recommended products to use at home.

New consumers using spa services – Men, teenagers, senior citizens and pregnant women frequently include a visit to a spa as part of their lifestyle routine and all have different needs. It is important that spa therapists can provide them with relevant information and professional services that make them feel comfortable.

Increased price sensitivity – Most visitors would expect to pay less for treatments in Thailand than in their home countries.