

Are Massage Therapy and Asian Bodywork Therapy Different?

Written by Maria Spuller

Tuesday, 23 September 2008 19:49 - Last revised Sunday, 15 March 2009

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This article developed from a general question that has come up repeatedly in just about all arenas: legal, social, educational, spiritual and more. This time specifically, someone asked for information in support of the statement that Acupressure, a form of Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT) is a valid and viable somatic profession to be taught at the college level.

Several major differences between ABT/ Acupressure and Massage Therapy are:

[Minimum standard curricula

[Standards used to evaluate educational programs

[Definition used by the Department of Education

[National certification

[Professional organization

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As you read through our minimum **curricula** requirements, (titled “ [AOBTA 500-hour Curriculum](#) ”) you will notice that the techniques, treatment principles and practice for Asian Bodywork Therapy are entirely different from those of massage. Further, most of the AOBTA schools and colleges teach curricula closer to 600-800 hours.

The Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (COMTA) has a misleading name due to the fact that **they evaluate and accredit schools and bodywork programs** other than massage therapy. COMTAs accreditation standards are recognized by the USDE and have been developed in consultation with practitioners and educators on the field. It is important to point out that the standards they use to accredit ABT programs mirror the AOBTA's curricula requirements and do not include any massage techniques or treatment principles.

The **Department of Education** has a totally separate definition of ABT from massage. ABT practices such as acupressure and shiatsu are not included in the definition of massage, and massage is not in any part of the definition of ABT. Go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002165.pdf> and scroll to page 369, or see attached excerpt:

In the Fall of 1999, the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) presented their new **National Certification Exam for Asian Bodywork Therapy**. The NCCAOM is a member of the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA) and is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), which has the highest voluntary certification standards in the United States. For more information, go to <http://www.nccaom.org>

In conclusion, the **professional membership organization** for Asian Bodywork Therapists does not admit massage therapists unless they have had equivalent professional training for ABT. The AOBTA is a professional membership organization, which advocates public policy that protects and promotes Asian Bodywork Therapy and its practitioners. We serve our community of members by initiating appropriate credentialing criteria, defining practice and educational standards, and providing resources for training, networking and professional development. In the past ten years, the AOBTA has grown to be the largest Asian Medicine professional membership organization in North America.

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