

Hello Alex, hello Michael.

Thank you for recently staging an opportunity to visit with the RMTAO Board of Directors. Thank you as well for continuing to host town hall events throughout Ontario.

At the recent Niagara/Saint Catharines town hall, I submitted three requests for consideration by the RMTAO's operations staff. I believe these are critically important steps in addressing a chronic deficit in our discipline's level of engagement.

Given the Board is considering the next Strategic Plan, I'm writing both of you in earnest to sincerely consider these three requests:

- 1) Please provide training in leadership and facilitation to CBN coordinators, so they can produce more fruitful, frequent meetings.
- 2) Please hold symposia – a gathering of subject matter experts and practitioners to share information, dialogue and debate, and ultimately forward solutions to our discipline's most salient problems
- 3) Please re-instate a social media platform so RMTAO members can talk to each other.

I believe a number of the recurrent, recalcitrant problems that hamstring our profession lay in our failure to come together in dialogue and debate on a regular basis, thus stultifying the profession from evolving.

Here are just some of the critical quandaries unresolved and lingering for me:

- Shared agreement and an evidence-basis for therapy approaches to common conditions, including agreed upon and standardized outcome measures
- Shared vernacular of pathologic state changes (eg: myalgia, myositis) in the body under duress, and positive changes as a result of the application of massage
- Professional identity confusion across different populations served in physical rehabilitation, hedonistic spa, athletics and human potential ie: "clients or patients"
- Intransigent negativity in public and media perception
- Given the design of private offices and sole practices, how we can increase security and support for RMTs against predation and aggression in the workplace
- A system to foster leadership within the profession, and recruit more volunteers in carrying the momentum of our shared objectives forward
- A method to advance our collective knowledge and interests in research literacy and capacity
- Strategies to significantly improve relationships with extrinsic forces that affect policy and practice - government, insurer and gatekeeper HCPs

- Tapping subject matter experts in consideration of how generative artificial intelligence will impact RMT practice, and the health care system in general

Here are just some of the consequences of continuing with a largely unengaged membership:

- It took 25 years – a quarter century – to regulate just 5 provinces. There have been no newly regulated provinces since 2019.
- It was 2014 – 12 years ago this Spring – smaller and arguably more alternative disciplines of naturopathy and acupuncture – received HST exemption on their services. Massage Therapists remain one of the very few RHP still charging HST on services, causing prejudicial and unnecessary load on our patients.
- Previewing the RMTAO’s Sexual Assault and Harassment survey 2025, it’s clear our practitioners are unprepared to deal en masse with predatory behaviour in work settings, and feel unsupported and even discouraged in how to do so.

Let’s consider the ways RMTs are NOT engaging in Ontario:

- ♣ Last year 23 Community-Based Networks (CBNs) met an aggregate 56 times – an average of just 2.4 times each in the calendar year. I argue that’s insufficient to address the critical problems facing us. Further, many CBNs struggle with antipathy and insufficient attendance, ignorance of jugular problems, compelling subjects to attract and sustain interest, and no training in meeting facilitation and leadership.
 - ♣ The RMTAO, surprisingly, does not utilize symposia, or public round-table discussions with subject matter experts, to intensively address the significant problems mentioned above. Such intensives could assist in forwarding policy and compliance in addressing these problems. I believe engagement can move the RMTAO beyond representation of just 44% of the total number of RMTs registered in Ontario...a level suffered for many years.
 - ♣ The RMTAO member Facebook page was discontinued in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and never resurrected, so RMTAO members don’t have a shared digital forum to stay engaged directly with other RMTAO members.
 - ♣ The AGM Q&A is relatively brief and controlled. We should take opportunity to utilize members that gather for input and solutions to the intractable problems of the profession.
- Fun fact: the RMTAO did make use of attendees via round-table, facilitated discussions, some 12-15 years ago in Ottawa (ask Amanda Baskwill, then Chair), and was met with great reception.

Our elected Board of Directors holds meetings in camera, understandable given the need to conduct Board business. However, this can appear to the membership as being unavailable to directly discuss issues salient to them. While I appreciate the recent virtual meeting with the Board, and I understand the time confines of the call, members were prohibited from speaking.

Alex promised this is the first of a number of steps to improve member engagement with their elected Board members, so I enthusiastically hope we will eventually move beyond the Q&A format to a dignified and prolonged dialogue with our representatives. We can trust our members want more than answers to questions...they want a hand in solving the seemingly intractable dilemmata affecting their day-to-day practices.

Imagine if Board members were recruited in properly informing discussions at the CBN level for CBN members to flesh out. Think of how member engagement would improve if input was directly solicited by their RMT familiars at the local level.

Digital surveys are inept and incomplete at capturing qualitative input from members. I caution, if screening social media is used as a qualifier of the collective's mood and opinion, social media is corrupted by the ignorant and intransigent. Hence, social media is a poor measure of the weight and scope of critical issues facing RMTs daily. Utilizing the CBNs as hubs of dialogue and debate, peppered by inputs from the Board of Directors, can, I believe, move the needle on addressing essential issues.

Engagement is mentioned in the RMTAO Strategic Plan 2024-2027 in terms of programs and services, but I would like to see engagement with the members frequently and meaningfully as a central pillar of strategic plans going forward.

I conclude that attending the needs and interests of a burgeoning RMT population would get much easier for the Board and the RMTAO operations staff if we invite engagement, teach and train for leadership, and recruit volunteers massively to undertake big tasks.

Bottom line: Ontario RMTs need to engage far more often than they currently do. They need training in leadership, and direction on the critical issues if our discipline is ever to evolve. We all are individually and collectively accountable to addressing the serious problems our beloved discipline faces, and this task can be driven by our representative association.

Thank you for your time and dedication,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Dillon", with a horizontal line underneath.

Don Dillon, RMT