

And they're off... Piloting the CMTCA accreditation process

The Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA) is pleased to present this update on its continuing work to develop national standards and a national accreditation process for Canadian massage therapy education programs. It summarizes the results of the pilot tests that were undertaken from late April to early June 2016.

Thank you! CMTCA thanks the surveyors, the staff and students at the pilot site organizations, and everyone else involved who worked tirelessly to make the pilot tests a reality. Your dedication and commitment are helping to create a stronger and more effective accreditation program.

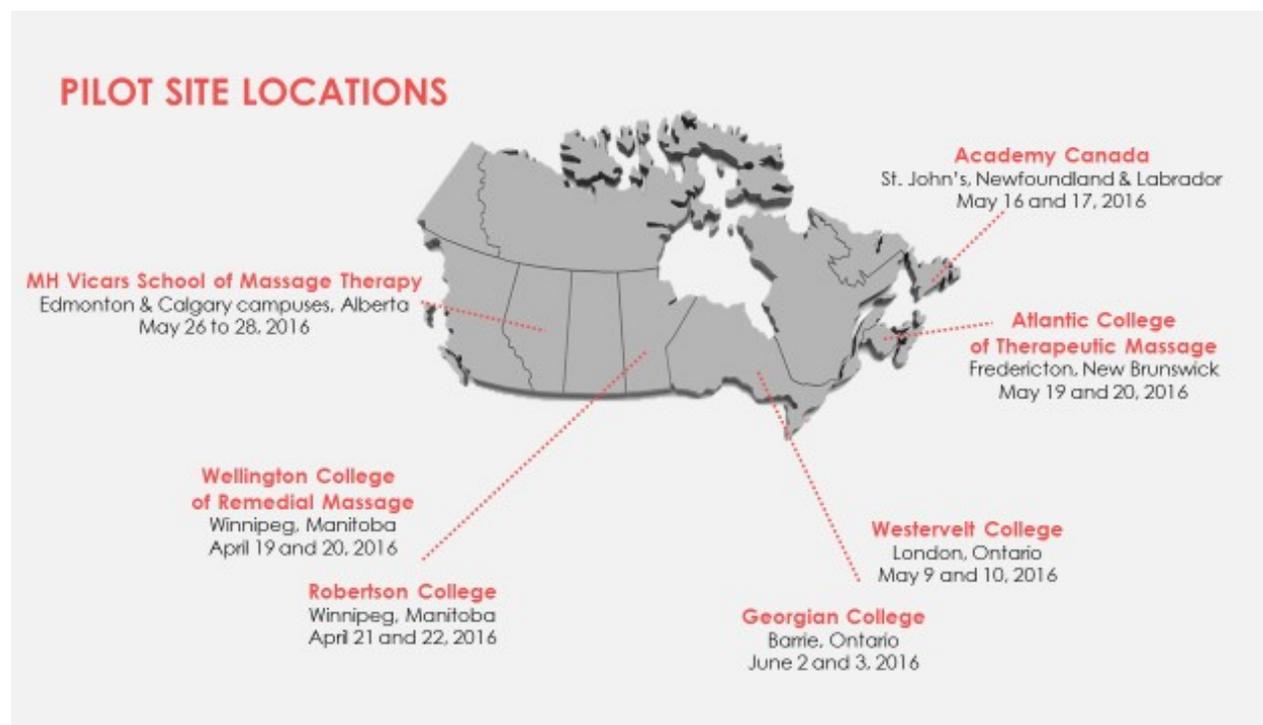
Getting ready

Pilot test focus

The primary focus was to test the accreditation process—particularly the tracer method, interviewing techniques, focus groups, and reporting—rather than to assess the standards or the education program per se. The pilot sites and the surveyors completed evaluations after the site visits (the evaluation questions can be found in the [appendices](#)), and the CMTCA staff members who attended each pilot provided their own observations and feedback.

Locations

Eight pilot tests took place in three regulated provinces (Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland) and two unregulated provinces (Manitoba and Alberta). In preparation, 24 surveyors underwent comprehensive training on the accreditation process, the standards, and the tracer method in April, and 10 of them participated in the pilot tests.



The tracer method

A “tracer” is the method surveyors use to assess a program’s compliance with the standards. Surveyors “trace” their way through a topic or area—for instance, curriculum, or human resources—as per their assigned section(s) of the standards. They ask questions, make observations, conduct interviews, and review documentation. A tracer is an effective way to do an in-depth evaluation of all aspects of a program, rather than just the academic portion.

A tracer may appear unstructured, in that surveyors spend some of their time walking around observing activities and talking to staff, students, patients, and others, but they are always focused on collecting information related to the standard they are reviewing.

Preparation

Before the site visit, CMTCA provided the education program with the standards and information about the process, a site visit schedule, the names of the surveyors and others who would be attending, and consent forms to be signed.

The pilot site was asked to review the standards; address logistics (i.e., hotels and restaurants in the area, resources such as working space and internet access, a key contact person); and educate staff, students, patients, and others as required about the purpose of and process for the site visit.

Debrief

At the end of the site visit, surveyors provided the education program with a debrief of their findings, addressing its performance against the standards and identifying some areas of strength and areas for improvement. A formal accreditation report was not issued for the pilot test sites.

Results

Feedback from surveyors and the pilot sites was overwhelmingly positive. And, as is appropriate for a quality improvement exercise, there were also valuable and insightful suggestions for improvement.

Feedback from pilot sites

Pilot site organizations found the accreditation experience to be useful and informative. One expressed appreciation for how the team sought information from the people who were affected—students, staff, alumni, and clinic clients—while another reported finding the process to be informative and thorough as well as invasive and intimidating at times.

The benefit is letting students and instructors see the confidence we have in our program by asking it to be scrutinized by professionals in the field ... it's a chance to initiate changes and improvements to make it even better and allow them to be an active part of the process.

~ Pilot site education program

Some pilot sites requested that more information about the process and the standards be available prior to the site visit, and that the intent behind some questions and criteria be clarified.

Overall, most criteria were rated as met or partially met. These criteria were rated as unmet at most programs: 3.10/3.11/3.12 (advisory bodies), 3.20 (health and safety committee), 4.6 (performance evaluation review), 6.3 (international students), 6.9 (code of ethics violations), and 7.3 (exam results).

Additionally, one of the key issues was that many programs did not have formal policies and processes in place.

In the end, each pilot site was very pleased to have taken part and felt it was good preparation for the actual accreditation process.

SUMMARY

Pilot site organization feedback



- Informative and thorough
- Great experience
- Comprehensive
- Provides direction
- Chance for self-reflection
- Collaborative
- Non-intimidating
- Very fair and effective
- Surveyors were generous with information and explanations
- Great preparation for “the real thing”



- Invasive and intimidating
- Classroom and faculty disruptions
- Nerve wracking wondering if we meet the standards
- Felt at times like an interrogation
- Difficult when we realized we have let some things slip
- Hard to provide a rationale for many policies and processes



- More detailed overview of process and tracer methodology
- More understanding of the “why’s” of the standards
- Not always sure what information was being sought
- After the site visit, ensure accreditation feedback is very candid and specific
- Clarify how far back documents need to go

Feedback from surveyors

Surveyors were virtually unanimous in their praise of the tracer methodology. They found it to be a creative, flexible tool that helped them obtain a more in-depth understanding of how the education program operated. One surveyor mentioned finding the process intimidating at times and felt it hindered the ability to follow information.

Having the CMTCA staff member on-site was commended for providing guidance and direction as to the quality improvement process and the tracer methodology, for logistical and technological support, and for reminders about time management. Surveyors found this role contributed to consistency within the site visit and across site visits, bringing that crucial big picture perspective.

Tracers are a fantastic way to get to the bare bones of the organization and get a snapshot of what’s going on. You get a sense of “wholeness” within the program. I’m sold!

~ Pilot site surveyors

Key issues identified and some of the suggestions made to address them are summarized below.

Documentation: Providing information prior to the site visit

- Particularly for criteria related to curriculum and jurisdictional requirements, a review of pertinent documentation prior to the site visit could have been helpful.

Information management: Organizing information for decision making and reporting

- At times, it was challenging to manage the volume of information being collected. Templates or checklists could help with this process.

Interviewing: Keeping interviews on track and on topic

- Being more assertive about time management during interviews, and asking for examples or to be shown how something was done could have improved the interview process.

Logistics: Looking for people, places, and information

- Particularly on larger campuses, time was lost trying to find people, offices, or documentation. Being more familiar with the site map and program roles and responsibilities before the site visit started could have helped.

Planning: Organizing tasks between surveyors

- Tracers for some standards (1, 3, and possibly 7) are better done with a partner, while the others could be done independently.

Scheduling: Adding planning time and amending time allocated for some tracers

- More time for some tracers and more planning time, having an introductory meeting with the program staff, tracing more challenging areas earlier in the day could improve flow.

Standards and criteria: Clarifying the intent of some criteria

- Clarifying how to trace criteria related to curriculum/science content, practice hours and competencies, and jurisdictional requirements would be helpful. It is important to be aware of different terminology among programs.

Next steps

CMTCA has reviewed all feedback in detail and is incorporating it as appropriate into the standards and the accreditation process, as well as into the surveyor training program and manual.

Again, huge thanks to everyone for their many contributions to the pilot tests. We'll end with this comment from a pilot site organization, which we found very encouraging, *"The process seems sound – I think schools will feel at ease once they see it in action."*

As always, please feel free to share your thoughts, ideas, or suggestions on the pilot tests or any other aspect of this exciting journey we are taking together.

*Canadian Massage Therapy Council on Accreditation
Toronto, Ontario
July 2016*

info@cmtca.ca/www.cmtca.ca

Appendix A Evaluation questionnaire for pilot site education programs

CLIENT EVALUATION OF PILOT SURVEY

Dates of Site Visit:

Location of Site Visit:

1. Overall, how would you describe your experience with the CMTCA pilot survey?
2. What were the benefits of the tracer process for your education program?
3. What were the negative aspects of the survey process for your education program?
4. What information do you wish that you had in advance of the survey that would have contributed to a more satisfactory survey experience?
5. FURTHER COMMENTS (strengths/areas for improvement)

Appendix B Evaluation questionnaire for pilot site surveyors

Section 1 The Tracer

| | <i>Strongly disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly agree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Time was sufficient to prepare and conduct the tracer. | | | | | |
| The order of the tracers in the schedule was appropriate and could be followed without major adjustments. | | | | | |
| The equipment and Excel template to input data after the survey was appropriate and easy to use. | | | | | |

1. Which tracers (according to standard section) do you think are most effectively conducted with a partner surveyor?
2. Which tracers do you think should be conducted by only one surveyor?
3. Were there any specific criteria that you found needed adjusting to be more effectively interpreted by the surveyor and/or the education program? Please be specific.
4. Given your pilot experience, do you have any suggestions on how to make the tracer process more effective and / or rigorous regarding gathering the information needed to objectively and thoroughly assess education programs against the standards?
5. What will you do differently on the next survey? Why?
6. Overall, how did you feel about the tracer process as a tool to evaluate the effectiveness of a massage therapy education program?

Section 2 CMTCA Support and Feedback

| | <i>Strongly disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly agree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| The feedback and guidance provided by the CMTCA representative during the survey were appropriate and of benefit to the team. | | | | | |

1. What additional support from CMTCA staff is needed to ensure quality survey visits?
2. A CMTCA staff person will always be present on survey visits. Given your experience, what specifically should the CMTCA staff member contribute to the survey team to ensure consistent quality surveying from one survey to another?