



## The Experiences of Learning

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I'm one of the luckiest guys in the world!

One of the best things about being editor of *Massage Today* is having knowledge about many of the educational offerings held around the country. Maybe it's because I didn't get into massage and bodywork until I was well into my 40s, or because I could have applied myself more while going to massage school, but I could be quite happy as a perpetual student of the art and science of massage and bodywork. I love the opportunity to attend conventions, conferences, symposia and workshops because they appeal to my preference to enjoy social situations, as well as obtain continuing education.

In June, I attended the 2004 North American Conference on Multidisciplinary Approaches to Low Back and Pelvic Pain in Tampa, Fla. - my eighth continuing education event this year! So, if I go to so many workshops, what makes this one worthy enough to take up editorial space in *Massage Today*? With the amount of continuing education I take, it's not like I never had a low back pain class before!

This conference was special for many reasons - reasons important enough to share with you. The conference was sponsored by the *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*, which is (to my knowledge) the only peer-reviewed journal serving our field, in association with The International Alliance of Healthcare Educators (IAHE). More importantly, the conference presenters were of the highest possible caliber and dealt with what is possibly one of the most prevalent patient complaints we face as practitioners: low back and pelvic pain.

The conference was designed to show new ways to assess the body, offer approaches that can help effect meaningful changes in our clients, demonstrate simple techniques we can employ immediately, and inspire us to learn even more. It did all of those things, providing more than value for the time and money spent. I must admit, the thing that first drew my interest to this conference was a particular presenter who has long been one of my "heroes."

Since reading the book, *Soft Tissue Manipulation*, in massage school, Leon Chaitow, ND, DO, has held my attention. I now own eight or nine of his books! I flew to Florida primarily because he was one of the speakers. What a pleasant surprise that all of the presenters were of similar knowledge and ability!

It was my first introduction to Dr. Carolyn McMakin, a chiropractor, and clinical director of the Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Clinic of Portland, Ore., and to Dr. John Downes, Dean of the

College of Chiropractic at Life University in Marietta, Ga. I further had never experienced the knowledge and presentation style of Jan Dommerholt, a physical therapist from Bethesda, Md., who, among a long list of credentials, serves as cofounder and director of the Janet G. Travell, MD, Seminar Series.

In addition to Dr. Chaitow, I have had previous educational opportunities with both Judith Aston and Judith DeLany and know them all as talented, insightful and superb educators. The three-day event was a masterpiece of intellectual stimulation. I heard Jan Dommerholt share new insights into the role of multifidus muscles in pelvic stabilization concepts, along with treatment options such as intramuscular trigger point stimulation with dry needling; I heard Dr. Downes speak on foot structure and function, and how they directly affect homeostasis of the lower kinetic chain, and the direct impact of lower limb function on the lumbopelvic region.

Dr. McMakin spoke on frequency specific microcurrent therapy (FSM) to treat neuropathic pain and myofascial trigger points, and experienced firsthand the application of FSM on a bout of shoulder tendonitis I was experiencing. (*Note: While use of electrical devices may not be included in the scope of practice of all massage therapists, many state regulations are silent on the issue; it is specifically included in Florida's massage regulation.*)

I heard Judith Aston, who must be at least as "mature" as I am (she started a movement education program for athletes, dancers and actors in 1963!) but moves like a woman in her 20s, talk about the implications of Aston Patterning® and its relationship to the body's dimension to alignment and function, as well as a demonstration of body positions that increase or decrease support for the pelvis in gait.

I heard Leon Chaitow talk about positional release approaches to the care of low back problems and a fascinating discussion on the influence of low back pain on breathing-pattern disorders. Finally, I heard Judith DeLany discuss the dysfunctions and referral patterns associated with trigger points as sources of lumbar and pelvic pain.

OK, so it was all great stuff, and I can't say enough about it. Two things, though, really stand out for me. First, amid all the degreed and titled individuals presenting, only Judy DeLany listed a simple "LMT" after her name. I was quite pleased to see how she was accepted as a peer among the high-powered presentation group. Her command of subject matter and ability to "fit in" as a leader in a group of PTs, DCs and DOs made me proud to also have "LMT" tacked on to my name!

The second thing that stood out for me was that this wonderful opportunity was woefully under-attended! I didn't do an actual count of the attendee list, but I would estimate only about 80 people were in attendance. This conference appealed to any practitioner dealing with low back and pelvic pain, not just massage therapists. There should have been hundreds in the room! The ability to sit in a room and get actual individual attention from presenters of this stature was incredible! My clients are reaping the benefits of my attendance at this conference; I'm doing better work because I made the investment of time and money. I wish you had been there, too! I wish you could have shared in the experience with some of my heroes!

This was the fourth North American "Multidisciplinary Approaches" conference, and I'm sure there

will be more. If your practice includes clinical aspects, you might want to search these out. Who are your heroes in massage and bodywork education? There are so many out there! Go take a class ... not because you have to, but because you want to stir up your passion to learn something new. You'll be pleased you did. You can write it off your taxes, it will actually make you money, and your client load will naturally increase. This sounds like something good for practitioners, presenters and the public! So what are you waiting for?

Thanks for listening!

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