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AMTA Board of Directors Disbands Council of Schools

By Christie Bondurant, Associate Editor

The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) Council of Schools (COS) was terminated in September after a unanimous vote by the AMTA national board. After months of evaluation, the AMTA's Governance Committee recommended the association's board of directors (BOD) vote to remove sections of the bylaws that refer to the COS, effectively dissolving the COS as an AMTA organization. And on Sept. 22 at the AMTA BOD meeting, board members made a unanimous vote to end the 27-year relationship with the Council of Schools, effective Oct. 1, 2009. But while the relationship ends abruptly, mutual concerns over incompatibility between the two entities had been growing for some time.

AMTA Recommendation

Late last year, the AMTA had charged the AMTA/COS Workgroup of the Governance Committee with "[researching and exploring] the COS infrastructure and how COS fits into AMTA infrastructure/culture," according to a June 2009 AMTA notice to its members. The workgroup came back with two bylaw changes that effectively severed the relationship. The workgroup's reasons for removing the council include:

- aspects of AMTA governing documents currently contribute to confusion in the AMTA/COS relationship;
- the current COS structure is not in line with other council structures; and
- other membership categories of AMTA do not have a council.

The sections removed in the AMTA bylaws were Section 5 "Membership in Council of Schools" of Article III which states, "Any school joining as a School member is a member of the AMTA Council of Schools," and Section 2 "Council of Schools" of Article IX, which lists the name, purpose and membership clauses of the COS.

The workgroup also suggested that the Planning Committee "consider establishing a standing committee for schools as part of its annual volunteer workforce review."

While the board voted in favor of the recommendation to end the council, plans to develop an AMTA standing committee have not been publicly disclosed. According to an AMTA press release dated Oct. 1, 2009, "the governance change for the COS Board has no effect on AMTA school and educator members and their benefits." The AMTA schools membership classification will now include "educators" and be called "Massage Therapy Schools and Educators."

Council Initiates Independence

For decades the Council of Schools had worked with the AMTA toward a common goal to "support excellence and innovation in massage therapy education and inspire new educational methods, models, and programs." Founded in 1982, the COS was an independent forum for massage therapy school owners, administrators, and faculty to communicate. While independent, the council worked closely with the AMTA, as it was the largest massage association of that time. And in 1999, the COS made the choice to officially become the AMTA Council of Schools with hopes to expand and become more effective for the massage profession as a whole. Since then, the council had expanded from a 55-member school council to a 480-member school council.

However, in late January at the COS annual meeting and leadership conference, COS members expressed a desire to retain independence from the AMTA, stating concerns of member schools being underserved and council members as ineffective under the AMTA control. In that meeting, a motion was made to establish the COS as an independent nonprofit organization. The motion made by council member Iris Burman was adopted by a majority vote of the member schools.

In March 2009, the COS board of directors submitted a proposal, requesting funding for an independent school organization, to the AMTA board. However, because the organization proposed "[did] not meet the association's granting criteria it could not receive AMTA financial support."

New Educational Organization Emerges

Recently launched, the Alliance for Massage Therapy Education is an independent organization comprised of a six-member leadership team including Iris Burman, Su Bibik, Stan Dawson, Eugenie Newton, Rick Rosen and Pete Whitridge. Still in its developmental stages, the Alliance is a nonprofit organization

designed to serve as the independent voice and advocate for the entire massage education sector.

According to Rick Rosen, executive director of the leadership team for the Alliance, the need for an independent educational organization has been a long time coming. In light of the newly disbanded COS, Rosen explains the position of the Alliance in the following statement made to *Massage Today* on Oct. 6:

"The Leadership Team has received a number of questions regarding the position of the Alliance in relationship to the two major professional associations, ABMP and AMTA. To begin with, it is important to note that most long-established professions have an independent body that represents the educational institutions in that discipline; it's considered an essential part of the overall structure of a profession. In light of that, the Alliance has been established as a free-standing organization. This means the domain of massage therapy education finally has a champion of its own.

"For a number of years, both ABMP and AMTA have maintained membership categories for massage schools. From the stand-point of the Alliance, it is beneficial for schools to have a relationship with the associations that provide membership opportunities and insurance for their students and graduates. The Alliance views this as complementary to the fundamental services and advocacy it will provide its own members - not as competition. In fact, the Leadership Team is already in communication with ABMP and AMTA to determine how the Alliance may best operate in cooperation with them.

"While the formal announcement of the Alliance's launch just occurred on August 31, the process that led to this event has been ongoing for several years. There has been considerable dialogue among interested educators around their vision for an optimal education organization. This developmental process has been completely separate from the internal restructuring AMTA recently completed with its Council of Schools.

"The focus of the Leadership Team is clearly on the future of this new endeavor. By strengthening and improving massage education, the Alliance will bring great benefit to schools, teachers, students and practitioners, along with everyone in the general public who receives massage therapy."

The Alliance is in the process of conducting a membership recruitment campaign and planning for the initial organizational meeting in 2010. For more information on the Alliance, visit their Web site www.afmte.org.

The AMTA asserts that their decision "regarding the COS Board is not a response to the recently-announced Alliance for Massage Therapy Education. The association looks forward to learning more about the Alliance and any possible opportunities for collaboration."



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