

“The best thing a student can do is keep learning.” —Julia Morrow

Ask the Professional Embracing Education

This column features an interview with a massage professional, offering students the insight that comes from a variety of experiences. Julia Morrow, a sign language interpreter from Northridge, California, acted upon a lifelong interest in holistic health and, twenty-one years after receiving her bachelor's degree, enrolled in massage therapy school. Morrow is dedicated to educating and helping those around her—whether aiding her clients or volunteering her services to a variety of community organizations. (Most recently, she provided massage to athletes competing in the 16th Winter Deaflympics in Salt Lake City.) Below, Morrow reflects on the role these passions have played in her career as a massage therapist.

What were some of the most rewarding elements of your massage training?

The atmosphere of my school was really good; the teachers were loving, supportive, and very knowledgeable. I really enjoyed the camaraderie of our small class. We were such a close-knit group at the end. We saw each other every day, partnered up and worked on each other, and went through trials and tribulations together. There was a lot of laughter.

What were challenging elements of the training?

I went to a three-month program and we had different teachers for each month's section. The first month, the teacher for the lecture portion gave us quizzes every Friday, which was great—it really keeps you on the ball. But the teachers for the second and third months didn't require weekly quizzes. I personally would have liked to have them every week—maybe because I have a teaching degree I think it's better to keep students on their toes and encourage them to do their homework. Memorizing anatomy was really tough, but I had the summer off because I work at a university, so it was a perfect time for me; it was rough for some of the other students who were working full-time jobs while they were in school.

How do you educate your clients?

I put a lot of emphasis on educating people, not only about what the field is all about, but to teach people about how to stretch, live holistically, and make small changes that make big differences in their lives. When someone sees me for a massage, I don't just focus on that hour. I give every new client papers on the physical and psychological benefits of massage. I encourage my clients to read articles about their own health, so I give them websites to read or direct them to links that I have on my website.

Have you learned any new massage techniques through your volunteer work?

The emergency response training I received [through Emergency Response Massage International] required learning a new chair massage routine to give to the first responders (firefighters, police) at a disaster site. For the Heart Touch Project, there was a long weekend training of learning about the special populations we might be working with (AIDS patients, hospice patients, anyone who is close to death), the emotional issues involved, and the “compassionate touch” strokes used.

What makes your massage therapy practice unique?

My passion for holistic work made it easy to learn the material when I was in school and it is keeping me motivated to learn more: to go to more classes, research constantly, and read professional journals. The energy I have for it comes through when I'm working on people and they sense that I care about them and I know what I'm doing. I refer clients (for chiropractic, acupuncture, or physical therapy) because I'm concerned about helping them feel better in all areas of their life. Another part that makes me unique is that I make house calls; people love that. They don't have to go to a day spa or a studio, get up, get dressed, and drive through traffic again.

What do you wish you had known while you were a student?

How to screen potential clients on the phone and how to turn away clients—to know what to say. When you have a client, how to fire them if it is not working out. How not to burn bridges and make them feel bad, but to ease them away from you and send them somewhere else if there's a problem. I had to learn that on my own.

Do you have any suggestions for current students?

Students have a huge responsibility when they're in this little room with one person. Love the clients where they are and help each client heal in all aspects of life. The best thing a student can do is keep learning. Don't be afraid to say you don't know about something, but offer to research it and get back to the client with an answer.

When you're working on someone's body, helping somebody with physical ailments, you need to have a reason for why you're putting your hands where you are. You're not just putting your hands vaguely on somebody's body; you're putting them on specific places. You have to know the proper way a muscle grows and be able to feel problems in the muscle fibers.

If there is a particular modality that wasn't taught in your basic program, you can easily, at any time before or after you graduate, go and take classes at any school. The more classes you take before or after you graduate is to your benefit. Always want to continue learning.