

# Hands On!

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## FEATURES

### Have Hands – Will Travel Aly in India

Ethics in Practice:  
the right of refusal

Mentoring; Part 3



Australian Association  
of Massage Therapists

# Have Hands – Will Travel

**Alexandra Curd** BTSM, NMT, PostGrad Dip FemErd

When I was a massage student in New Zealand, some 10 years ago, the opportunities for professional development were fairly slim and the negative connotations associated with massage haunted our profession, writes AAMT member Alexandra Curd. Since then, she adds, there have been many trailblazers and with the help of professional associations such as AAMT, massage therapy has really come into its own.

I initially gravitated to the idea of studying massage in order to get involved in the sports area and subsequently, get paid to travel. After graduation I worked with some prominent sports teams in New Zealand, mainly rugby, swimming and cycling. After one year I made the migration across the ditch to the beautiful sunny Perth and worked and managed a Sports Massage Clinic there for six years. It was during this time, and with the support of my employers, I started to travel overseas in order to find ways in which I could help the less fortunate and learn new techniques.

First up I travelled around Zimbabwe and South Africa. The people were absolutely beautiful, but very sceptical of my intentions initially. Once a rapport was formed their scepticism melted and we began to share knowledge and exchange techniques.

My next trip was a few years later. I had read in the AAMT newsletter that Massage Australia was looking for massage therapists to work for two weeks in a Beijing Hospital and learn Tui Na and Chinese Medicine. I jumped at the opportunity and was fortunate enough to be able to participate in this trip. It was fantastic, the hours were long and the

language was a barrier but the patients and doctors were extremely welcoming and my fellow participants were a wealth of knowledge too. It was a great feeling to be able to help our fellow humans as well as learn from them. I decided then and there that massage was such a valuable modality. If I wanted to continue on this journey and try to get into humanitarian work, I had better expand on my knowledge.

Back at work in Perth I took up correspondence study. I began to study Naturopathy as well as my Postgraduate Diploma in Female Endocrinology. During this time I was presented with an opportunity through 'Hands on Health Australia' to do my clinical placement overseas. I was offered Vanuatu or India. Naturally the idea of a beautiful tropical island appealed to me a great deal more than the 'dirty', 'repressing' country of India.

Due to some unforeseen circumstances the Vanuatu trip had to be cancelled but a position for the India trip was offered to me again. I declined the offer. I had been more aware of the media scrutiny of this foreign country ever since I had initially been offered a position and I did not appreciate the reports coming out of it. Time was ticking though and I needed to get my clinical hours completed. I did a bit more research and reluctantly took the position to spend two weeks in India and before I knew it, I was on my way. They have a saying in India: If you speak many tongues, you will never go hungry. The same can be said with massage. When language is a barrier, touch can speak many words.

I am currently living near the 'city of lakes' which is Udaipur in Rajasthan, India, working for a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) called Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti (JVS).

The organisation which I am working with has an emphasis on finding solutions that provide direct socio-economic improvements to rural populations, through traditional health care and rural development.



I have been here now for five months with the official position of Clinical Myotherapist and Volunteer Recruitment Officer. I absolutely love it. My position involves treatment of patients in our on-campus medical clinic, working with the resident medical doctor, organising rural health camps, liaising with universities and associations, running and developing volunteer, intern and student placement programs, and training Gurus (Traditional Folk Healers) in myotherapy and mobilisation techniques.

The work can be extremely draining and the conditions can be less than ideal. I have treated patients out in the Thar Desert in 42 degrees during a sand storm with nothing but some tiger balm and a grass mat. I have been treating patients in the mountains during monsoon season when the river banks have burst and we had to drop our equipment and head for higher ground. We often find ourselves with a lack of funding or a lack of resources. It is not unusual for me to be treating patients on the side of the road using the bonnet of a car as a treatment table. You certainly learn to be resourceful. Although it can be physically, mentally and emotionally draining it is totally worth it. The things I have achieved with the patients I have treated and the conditions I have seen are like nothing I have ever treated in clinics in Australia or New Zealand. I find it hard to believe that 16 months ago I was on a plane to India with extreme reservations about the country. After spending two weeks doing what was supposed to be a Naturopath Clinic placement, ended up being two weeks

of Massage Therapy and Neuromuscular Therapy training for the Gurus.

Once I returned to Australia, JMS asked me to return to India. So one year on I did, and I haven't left.

The opportunities which I have been given with 'Hands on Health Australia' have been fabulous and I am extremely grateful. I will be travelling soon to the Philippines and Cambodia with another therapist to try to get some projects set up and also get some student and volunteer programs up and running before returning home to India.

It has been a long and fascinating road to where I am now, and I don't plan on stopping anytime soon. I used to have reservations about my occupation and how it would be interpreted by society, but now I am so proud of what I am doing, and what I have achieved. Massage Therapy is a skill which is highly valued overseas and one that can do so much good. My advice to students is to take as many opportunities as



possible, they are out there, sometimes you just have to look but, more importantly, you should never forget that massage is such a valuable modality, the power of positive touch should never be underestimated.

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