

REPORT:

**DEFINITIONS
OF
REFLEXOLOGY**

Prepared by Christine Issel
with assistance from Bill Flocco
Originally prepared for the
America Reflexology Certification Board &
Reflexology Association of America May 2003
updated November 2013

INTRODUCTION

In order to have a unified profession we must seek to establish a unified definition to which most reflexologists can subscribe. In trying to create this universal definition several issues need to be kept in mind.

1. As we move forward in legislative endeavors at any level, it is important to have a similar definition in use and seen in printed literature by the different agencies representing reflexology. There is a national movement to assign billing codes to complementary therapies so that their practitioners can bill through insurance companies. However, in order to do that the practitioner must be licensed by the state*. So we will see more, not less legislation in the years ahead. (*Unlicensed professionals will be able to bill through a licensed practitioner to receive payment.)
2. A definition by the Reflexology Association of America (RAA) must be inclusive, to allow as many reflexologists as possible to subscribe to and thus become members of the association, without being too general as to be meaningless. Whereas a definition by the American Reflexology Certification Board (ARCB) needs to include what it tests.
3. With the best of intent, many reflexologists sometimes want to put as much as possible into a definition. Many people confuse a definition (which defines the word, or what is meant by the word Reflexology) with a scope of practice (what part of the body we work on), the theory (how it is believed to work), the application of techniques (the techniques used and how applied), its history or origin, its results or benefits (how it is going to help people). Actually, science and other professions do not care how Reflexology feels or that our clients like it.
4. There is no one definition that will work in all situations. Legal and legislative language is different from what the public uses, which is different from what reflexologists use amongst themselves in the field, which is different from the definition other professions use to identify us. A key may be to have a sentence to which all agree and then a second sentence, dictated by the situation in which it will be used, can be added.

In looking towards a definition we can ask ourselves what are the unique components of Reflexology that distinguish it from other modalities. According to Bill Flocco, two components unique to Reflexology are:

1. A Reflex Map that is touched; and
2. Touch Techniques unique to Reflexology

Let's take a little closer look at these two concepts.

1. A Reflex Map that is touched. Exclude the map, and it could be any number of modalities:
 - a. Massage or other bodywork disciplines
 - b. Meridian acupuncture
 - c. Well-Spring-Stream acupuncture
 - d. The California Technique & Brazilian Toe Massage
 - e. And other systems specific to feet, hands or ears, but not map related.

2. Touch Techniques unique to Reflexology. Exclude specific touch techniques and it could be any number of other modalities:
 - a. Vibration massage
 - b. Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)
 - c. Physical Therapy of the hands or feet
 - d. Auriculotherapy - medical use of implements, diagnosis, treatment of via the ears
 - e. Acupuncture
 - f. Reflexology
 - g. Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (PNF) Stretching
 - h. Joint manipulation of the hands and feet
 - i. Postural integration of the hands and feet
 - j. Polarity
 - k. And other specific ways of touching the feet, hands and ears

LEGAL DEFINITIONS OF REFLEXOLOGY

State Laws

North Dakota State Reflexology Law (Chapter 43-49-01)

Reflexology is the application of specific pressure by the use of the practitioner's hands, thumb, and fingers to reflex points in the client's hands, feet, or ears using alternating pressure, and such techniques as thumb walking, finger walking, hook and back up, and rotation on a reflex.

Tennessee State Reflexology Law (Chapter 63-30-102.6)

Reflexology means the application of specific pressures to reflex points in the hands and feet only.

New Hampshire Reflexology Law (Chapter 328-H:2) (defined by the scope of practice)

Reflexologists practice the use of alternating pressure applied to the reflexes within the reflex maps of the body located on the feet, hands and outer ears.

Washington State Reflexology Law (Chapter 18:108.010 [9])

"Reflexology" means a health care service that is limited to applying alternating pressure with thumb and finger techniques to reflexive areas of the lower one-third of the extremities, feet, hands, and outer ears based on reflex maps. Reflexology does not include the diagnosis of or treatment for specific diseases, or joint manipulations.

Local Ordinance

Henderson, Nevada Municipal Reflexology Code (4.06.1926)

(This is very similar to the definition used in the Las Vegas, Clark County Ordinance)

Reflexology is the application of specific pressure by the use of the practitioner's hands, thumb, and fingers to reflex points in the client's hands, feet or ears using alternating pressure, and such techniques as thumb walking, finger walking, hook and back up, and rotation on a reflex.

DEFINITIONS THAT EXEMPT REFLEXOLOGY FROM STATE MASSAGE LAWS

Here are several legal definitions of Reflexology that have successfully been used in legislation to indicate Reflexology is different from Massage Therapy and therefore exempt from the Massage Law.

Exemption from Maine State Law (Chapter 403-14307.2)

This chapter does not apply to the activities and services of individuals who practice other forms of tissue work exclusive of massage therapy, such as ... reflexology..., if those practitioners do not use the title 'massage therapist,' unless they choose to meet the requirements of this chapter.

Exemption from Washington D.C. Massage Ordinance

Manipulation of soft tissue limited to feet and hands is not massage.

Exemption from the Missouri Massage Law

If practice is restricted to hands, feet or ears, exempt.

Exemption from the New Mexico Massage Law

Massage therapy does not apply to...foot and hand reflexology (without the use of creams, oils or mechanical tools) [This wording was in the massage law and later, in the same law, was repealed. An exemption, under healers, currently within the Rules and Regulation of the Massage Board defines reflexology as limited to hands, feet and ears.]

Exemption from Washington State Massage Law

For purposes of this chapter, the practice of reflexology is limited to the hands, feet and outer ears. The services provided by those who limit their practice to reflexology are not designated or implied to be massage or massage therapy.

Exemption from the Illinois Massage Law

Practitioners of other forms of bodywork who restrict manipulation of soft tissue to the feet, hands, and ears, and who do not have the client disrobe, such as reflexology, are exempt from this Act.

DEFINITIONS THAT EXEMPT REFLEXOLOGY BASED ON THE HUMAN ENERGY FIELD

In 2000 in North Carolina and Maryland Reflexology became exempt when defined as having an energy base that is working within the human energy field.

Exemption from the Maryland State Massage Law

The practice of techniques executed with the recipient fully clothed which are specifically intended to affect the human energy field, including but not limited to...d. Reflexology...

Exemption from the North Carolina Massage Law

The practice of techniques that are specifically intended to affect the human energy field are exempt.

Note:

In March 2003 the American Massage Therapy Association's (AMTA) Government Relations Committee (GRC) wrote a formal document titled: Model State Code Proposal. It is designed to provide a model for new and revisionist state massage legislation. The GRC strongly recommends the use of 8 exemptions and lists them in section 3.0 of the model:

#5 is aimed at reflexology—or those persons who restrict their manipulation of the soft tissues of the human body to the hands, feet or ears.

#6 is for Feldenkrais, Trager and other practitioners who use touch, words and directed movement to affect the body; while

#7 is directed at energy practitioners--where touch is limited to that which is essential for palpation and affectation of the human energy system.

All these exemptions stipulate that these practitioners must not imply they are massage therapists or do massage therapy.

DEFINITIONS

Reflexology Association of America (RAA)

The definition adopted in 2006 - *Reflexology is a non-invasive complementary modality involving the use of alternating pressure applied to the reflexes within the reflex maps of the body located on the feet, hands and outer ears.* (Please see Definition [\[link\]](#) for most current definition used by RAA.)

Because RAA and ARCB worked together on legislative issues across the nation, ARCB in order to create a united definition with RAA, in 2007 ARCB adopted similar wording:

American Reflexology Certification Board (ARCB)

Reflexology is a non-invasive, complementary practice involving thumb and finger techniques to apply alternating pressure to reflexes shown on reflex maps of the body located on the feet, hands, and outer ears.

American Commission for Accreditation of Reflexology Education and Training (ACARET)

Reflexology is a manual technique applied to specific reflex points on the body (feet, hands, ears) within specific zones and microcosms of the body for psychological and physiological normalization of the total body.

Definition used in some Legislative Position Papers

Reflexology is the application of pressure through specific techniques with the thumbs and fingers to the feet and hands to bring the body into balance thus promoting well-being.

Medical Definitions

There are as many definitions to explain Reflexology as there are reflexologists. The word originally had a medical definition. Edwin Boring writes in his book, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, that Russian psychologist V.M.Bekterev (1857-1927) used the term objective psychology to designate his work but later in 1917 he coined the name reflexology to explain his work in the field of psychology. Therefore, if one consults a medical dictionary it will usually be noted the word is of Russian origin and means the study of behavior as consisting of reflexes. Below are some other definitions from medical dictionaries.

Reflexology: 1. The analysis of motor behavior in terms of component simple and complex reflexes. 2. The study of the neurophysiologic mechanisms of reflexes in general... International Dictionary of Medicine and Biology, 1986.

Reflexology: the science or study of reflexes... Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 1930.

Reflexology: 1. The study and interpretation of behavior in terms of simple and complex reflexes. 2. Any of various systems of questionable effectiveness that are held by their promoters to restore or promote health by manipulating parts of the body and especially the hands or feet...Webster's Medical Desk Dictionary, 1986.

Reflexology: 1. A system of massaging specific areas of the foot or sometimes the hand in order to promote healing, relieve stress, etc., in other parts of the body. 2. Medically, the study of reflex movements and processes... Random House Dictionary, 1987.

Reflexotherapy: Therapeutic effect achieved by stimulation or irritation at a distance from the area treated...International Dictionary of Medicine and Biology, 1986.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that there is no one definition that will work in all situations. As previously mentioned, the key may be to have a sentence to which most reflexologists could agree with, and then a second sentence added which would be dictated by the situation in which it will be used. For more information please contact ARCB or RAA.