

OFFICIAL OPINION NO. 76-63, Whether reflexology is controlled by the South Dakota Massage Act

June 18, 1976

Mr. Floyd Hauk  
Secretary-Treasurer  
South Dakota Board of Massage  
1126 Haines Avenue  
Rapid City, South Dakota 57701

OFFICIAL OPINION NO. 76-63

**Whether reflexology is controlled by the South Dakota Massage Act**

Dear Mr. Hauk:

The South Dakota Board of Massage has requested an official opinion from this office on the following question:

Is reflexology part of massage and thereby controlled by the South Dakota Massage Act of 1975?

Massage is defined under SDCL 36-10A-1 as:

The practice of a profession where the operator scientifically applies his hands to the patient. Variations of the following procedures are used: touch, stroking, friction, kneading, vibration, percussion, and medical gymnastics.

The practice of reflexology has been described by the South Dakota Supreme Court. From the facts in *Evans v. Hoyne*, 78 S.D. 509, 105 N.W. 2d 71 (1960) the Court stated:

. . . the practice of reflexology as disclosed by the record, is based on the theory that the human body has defined nerve zones and that the nerves from these zones have their endings in designated areas of the feet. Those who follow this practice claim that an ailment involving one of the nerve zones can be relieved by rubbing that area of the feet where the nerve endings from the affected zone are concentrated. These are known as reflex areas. It

is their claim that the treatment improves the circulation of the blood to the ailing zone by destroying the congestive deposits of calcium which have formed in its reflex areas.

The South Dakota definition cited in 36-10-A-1 is nearly identical in wording to that of North Dakota and comparable to Montana and Nebraska. In all of these states one must be licensed by the Board of Massage before he may practice reflexology. Other synonymous practices, such as foot massage and reflexology, are similarly regulated by these states.

It is the opinion of this office that the broad terminology in the definition of SDCL 36-10A-1 similarly regulates reflexologists in South Dakota. Before practicing reflexology, foot massage, or zone therapy, a license must be obtained from the South Dakota Board of Massage to practice massage.

Respectfully submitted,

WILLIAM J. JANKLOW  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

WJJ: DG: dk