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August 2016

Launch Your Practice with Ease

Cherie Sohnen-Moe

The date shown below each photo above is when that individual entered the field of massage therapy. These are among the thousands of new practitioners who begin practicing each year, for whom this special section was created.

The author of this special section is Cherie Sohnen-Moe, an experienced and respected educator, author, business expert and former practicing massage therapist. Cherie has almost 40 years' experience in the massage field.

She has led workshops internationally and authored the books *Business Mastery* and *Present Yourself Powerfully*, and co-authored *The Ethics of Touch.* Cherie directs Sohnen-Moe Associates, and is a founding member of and served as president of the Alliance for Massage Therapy Education from 2015 to fall 2017.

Download a copy of* MASSAGE Magazine's *e-book created especially for new massage practitioners and written by Cherie Sohnen-Moe at massagestudybuddy.com/career-ebook.

My Secret Weapon for Winning Over MDs

Building a referral community with health professionals is a great way to build a massage business. Here I'll explain how you can develop affiliations, initiate contact, approach and build relationships with medical personnel, including physicians and chiropractors.

Those efforts are what, collectively, are known as networking.

Develop Direct Affiliations

Assemble a list of people with whom you want to build alliances. Start by identifying allied providers who work with your target markets. Conduct an online search to find local providers.

Ask your clients, colleagues, friends and family for names of people for your list and why they recommend them. Determine your purpose, priorities and goals for developing these alliances, and create an action plan. Consider how much time you want to invest, the types of professions—and how many—you want to include in your network, and the levels of interaction you desire.

Start developing affiliations by establishing credibility. Many allied providers (particularly physicians) are required to obtain layers of licensure and certification. This leads them to judge competency by the number and types of certificates hanging on a wall—so some type of professional certification is helpful. However, pieces of paper aren't the only badges of credibility.

You can enhance your visibility and credibility by getting involved in the activities described in the previous section on increasing public awareness. In addition to those activities, you could attend meetings where there are other practitioners, join a local wellness organization (usually sponsored by a hospital), or volunteer your services for a charitable organization.

If you aren't well versed in the language of professional health care providers, learn to speak it now: Be aware of their philosophy, approach and terminology. While it's fine to refer to your leg as a "calf" when talking to the general public, you're less credible if you aren't more technical while addressing other practitioners (in those instances, you might reference a specific muscle, such as the *gastrocnemius*).

Keep in mind that not everyone shares your particular approach to wellness care. While many practitioners believe in and specialize in prevention, others, such as physical therapists, general physicians and surgeons, spend most of their time working with people on the remedial side of health care.

Initiate Contact

Some people prefer the front-door approach while others feel more comfortable with the side-door or even back-door method of developing affiliations. You might consider using a combination of these approaches.

Regardless of the approach, be sure to emphasize how your services enhance their practices and support their clients' goals. Briefly share about your training, highlight any unique modalities or equipment you use, and provide client testimonials.

Front-Door Approach

The three most common front-door approaches are the telephone, the mail (or email) and in person. Some people feel very comfortable just walking in and introducing themselves. This is a lot easier if your office is located close to other providers. In general, though, people prefer to initiate contact with a letter or telephone call. When you know the practitioner, a phone call usually suffices.

An effective technique for generating prospective alliance partners is to send a mailing to targeted wellness professionals. Direct the emphasis of your letter to the benefits of the reader. First introduce yourself and say what you do, including your abilities and qualifications. Focus on how you can help them, their practices and their clients. Create a separate letter for each type of practitioner you contact. For each type of provider you contact, include examples of how your services address their specific needs.

For instance, chiropractors see people who suffer from arthritis, back pain, fibromyalgia, migraines, injuries from sports activities, job injuries and automobile accidents. Psychiatrists work with people experiencing pain, stress disorders and migraines, as well as support people in personal growth and wellbeing. Obstetricians work with women experiencing back pain, edema, hormonal fluctuations and body image issues, as well as support general mother-and-child wellbeing. Touch therapists work with people of all ages, providing services ranging from relaxation to injury rehabilitation.

Highlight the mutual benefits of your association. Reassure your prospective colleagues that your intent is to support and complement each other's practice, not compete for clientele. Close the letter by telling them how to contact you, and that if you don't hear from them within the next two weeks, you will contact them.

Enclose your promotional material and a research article that lends credence to your claim for potential benefits. You can also include a stamped, pre-printed return postcard that allows the practitioner to respond directly. After the letter has been sent, you must follow up.

Side-Door Approach

The side-door approach is usually taken with the practitioner who keeps a buffer person—a nurse, assistant, or office manager—between herself and the public. This mainly occurs with medical doctors, chiropractors, dentists and other clinicians. Always treat these gatekeepers courteously, because they're the ones who will get you in the door to meet the practitioner (and encourage client referrals once a relationship is established). Be direct. Inform the office staff that you're interested in developing alliances with other providers.

If you're unable to make an appointment with the practitioner, ask when would be a good time to drop off your brochure. When you deliver your brochure, ask the office manager if she has any questions about your services or background, and offer to demonstrate your work, for example, by teaching a five-minute self-massage routine. Give free sessions to the provider and the staff. This is time well invested, because if you get the opportunity to demonstrate your services, and the recipient is impressed with the benefits, that person is likely to be interested in building an alliance with you. Give a certificate for the session(s), and if possible, book the appointment(s) before you leave.

Another way to build alliances through the side door involves your current clients. When conducting intake interviews, ask your clients if they're working with other wellness providers. If so, get their permission to send a note to those providers. This could range from a simple letter of introduction informing each practitioner that you're working with their client, to a more in-depth report with a brief description of your assessment,

treatment plan and progress notes. (Follow HIPAA guidelines when appropriate, and also include your promotional literature and extra business cards.)

Back-Door Approach

The back-door approach can appear to be the least threatening entrance to developing professional relationships. There are various ways to enter through the back door. You can get to know other practitioners by sponsoring a talk show on radio or cable (on which you bring wellness providers as guests) or by hosting an open house.

You can also encounter practitioners by attending networking events, social engagements, professional society meetings, special interest group meetings, professional development seminars and civic functions. Research these groups to determine which ones are most likely to attract the types of practitioners you wish to meet.

An example of attending events to develop professional alliances and get clients happened when I did a seminar tour in Australia. One of the participants in my workshop in Brisbane was a business coach. She attended my seminar for a dual purpose: to learn new information, but mainly to get new clients.

Here was a perfect opportunity: She could spend two days getting to know many people who were obviously interested in their professional development—with the knowledge that I wouldn't be there to work with them on an ongoing basis.

Forge Relationships

Your first official meeting with a wellness provider sets the tone for the relationship. Be punctual and look professional. Ideally you will also be giving a session, so your clothing can be a little more casual. Wear what you normally would while working with a client in your facility. Business attire is appropriate if you aren't giving a session. Greet the practitioner with a handshake and smile.

Briefly share information about yourself and encourage the provider to share information about her practice. Discuss ways in which you could be of mutual benefit (including reducing the demands on her time and energy) and set goals.

Confer about approaches to different situations, and determine how you would like to work together. Be certain to cover the preferred methods of future communication about shared clients. Some people favor written correspondence only, while others like to discuss cases and proactively work together to enhance clients' well-being.

While it isn't imperative that the practitioner experience your work, I strongly advise you make it happen. If she claims she is too busy, offer to do a modified session at her convenience. Also give a free session to the staff (see the previous section on initiating contact). Be upfront: tell her that it's important to experience your work firsthand to ethically feel good about making referrals to you.

The converse is also true. For you to refer clients to her, you need to experience her work—or in the very least get a sense of her methodology and style, which can be done by assessing the person's demeanor, office environment, and written materials such as intake forms and information pamphlets.

When you give her a treatment, do an intake interview, take notes and submit a sample of your records. This is of particular importance if you aren't a primary care provider, because it demonstrates your ability to do charting and follow-up.

Before you leave this meeting, schedule the next one—whether it's a telephone conversation, another session, or a more formal face-to-face meeting. Sometimes the steps to forging a relationship take several meetings to accomplish. M

Excerpted by permission from *Business Mastery, Fifth Edition.*

What CE Providers Don't Want You to Know

Online education provides convenient, affordable access to a wide array of topics, ranging from two-hour ethics courses to more than 150-hour modality trainings.

Many people take online courses to keep up with their required continuing education (CE) requirements, while others take courses because they want to learn about specific topics, regardless of how much credit they receive toward CE requirements.

Requirements

If you need to find an online course to meet your CE requirements, first check with your certifying or licensing bodies to find out their parameters before purchasing the education. Not all states have the same requirements. Find out the following:

- The number of hours required each year.
- Whether all or a percentage of the classes must be given by approved providers.
- The scope of topics that can be taken and which topics are not allowed.
- The minimum or maximum number of hours that can be allotted to certain subjects (for example, half of the hours must be hands-on or only up to one-third of the hours can be practice management).
- The method of learning allowed (some states don't allow distance learning for certain topics).
- Specific course requirements (for example, six hours of ethics every four years or CPR recertification every five years).

CE Sources

Many individuals, companies and organizations provide CE courses on a range of topics. Check advertisements in trade journals, magazines, newspapers and newsletters; contact your professional association for a list of providers; view online catalogs from massage and bodywork schools as well as local community colleges, universities and adult education programs; and peruse local specialty publications.

Search online with keywords such as *training, continuing education, home study, correspondence, massage schools, seminars, workshops* or the specific topic you are interested in exploring.

Credibility

Knowing how to evaluate CE providers is helpful, regardless of the reasons for taking CE courses. After all, it is your time and money you are investing. The depth, breadth and overall quality of CE courses vary greatly.

Do proper research before purchasing an online course. The key aspect is the credibility of the company and individual facilitating the course. The following steps will guide you in ascertaining credibility:

1 Review marketing materials such as advertisements, brochures or website in order to answer the following questions: Do the materials project a professional image? Are the courses clearly defined with specific objectives? Are the testimonials believable and are they from real people rather than a vague reference, such as "J.R. from Dallas, Texas"? Does the company offer any type of satisfaction guarantee or quality assurance?

2 Investigate the business' history in order to answer these questions: How long has the company or individual been in business? How many classes have been given? How many people have taken courses? What are the qualifications of the developer of the course? What are the professional affiliations held? Has the company or individual received any awards? Does the company or individual have credentialing status, such as approval by the National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork or a state provider?

3 Obtain references. Get feedback from people who have taken courses from this provider. The CE provider should give you names and contact information from past participants; keep in mind that the referrals will most likely be slightly biased, because such lists usually comprise happy customers. Talk with your colleagues. If you are registered with an online newsgroup, you can request support from members. You can also post questions on your Facebook page or Twitter. Ask specific questions, such as:

- How easy was it to contact the provider about the course?
- What did you like the most about the course?
- What did you like the least about the course?
- Were the course materials (handouts, manuals, videos) beneficial and of high quality?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the overall value of this course?
- Did you learn what you expected to learn?
- Were agreements kept?
- Do you think this was the best way to learn this subject? Why or why not?
- What is the likelihood of you taking another course from this company?

Factors

Online and distance-learning courses are ideal for people who learn best at their own pace. Keep in mind that these courses also vary: Some courses provide only written materials, while others include audio materials or videos.

Further, some courses are offered completely online, while others e-mail or mail all or a portion of the materials. Assessments can range from multiple-choice exams to written essays, documented case studies or submission of a video showing you performing a specific treatment protocol. M

Choose from a variety of online continuing education at* MASSAGE Magazine's *Online CE Center: massagemag.com/ceu-center.

The Insider's Guide to Setting Fees

Fee structures vary greatly depending on the type of work you do and where you are located. Setting an appropriate fee structure is necessary in any business.

Carefully consider all of the costs involved in running your business before you finalize your fee structure. This includes both fixed and unfixed costs.

Your fixed costs include rent, utilities, phone, equipment, loan payments, website maintenance, insurance, licenses and promotion. Unfixed costs are more time and task related and include keeping client records, networking, planning, extended business hours, traveling, practice management and continuing education classes.

4 Strategies

There are four predominant fee-setting strategies: the high-end rate, the industry standard rate, the low-end rate and the time-limited introductory rate. No matter which method you choose for determining your rates, be certain your fee structure is credible for your particular market and that it supports your financial well-being.

1 **The High-End Rate.** To adopt this fee-setting strategy, you will set your rate significantly higher than the industry standard rate in your geographic region, to target a small percentage of the population. This fee-setting strategy usually works only if your service is innovative, in demand and has no competition, or has significant value added to the basic service.

2 **The Industry Standard Rate.** To adopt this fee-setting strategy, you will determine the industry standard rate in your geographic region and align with it. To make that determination, search online for local therapists who offer the same types of services as you and research their rates. The therapists' rates will be posted online or may be obtained with a phone call.

3 **The Low-End Rate.** To adopt this fee-setting strategy, you will set your rate significantly lower than the industry rate in your geographic region. The benefit to you of adopting this fee structure is that you will attract a larger market share of clients. The drawback is you could find yourself booked with too many massages, which can ultimately have a negative effect on your body.

4 **The Time-Limited Introductory Rate.** To adopt this fee-setting strategy, you will offer introductory rates for a limited time, or package deals that reflect reduced rates. (Buy nine massage sessions and receive one free session, for example.)

Beware of the tendency to overextend introductory rates; you want to attract new clients but not be limited to the amount you can earn per session for too long a length of time.

Setting your fees is an important step in launching a massage practice. Choose one of these rate strategies to begin, and remember that your strategy may evolve over time. Ⓜ

The Art of Retail

Massage therapists are in a unique position to provide adjunct client care through product sales. Retailing helps therapists increase their income and provides clients with products to extend the treatment benefits to home. It offers convenience for clients, and that alone can reduce their stress.

Yet, many therapists are reluctant to sell products. They feel their job goes beyond touch and are concerned that retailing might be seen as unprofessional. They want to be respectful and not cross boundaries.

Product sales are a natural extension of the standard of care and healing already associated with massage therapy. A conflict doesn't need to exist as long as a few guidelines are followed. If you are already running a professional, ethical practice, then retailing can naturally follow suit. If you keep good boundaries, treat people with respect and fairness, and remain client-centered, then you will manage product sales in the same manner you manage the rest of your practice.

Most clients appreciate the opportunity to buy products from their massage therapists—as long as the sales process isn't pushy and is relevant to their needs and wants. Clients will trust your recommendations, especially on those products used in the session itself. Educating your clients about products means there is no real reason to have to *sell* anything to your clients.

No Hype Needed

Ethical products sales are not about hype or hard-sell tactics. The goal is to provide clients with easy access to high-quality products that enrich their well-being. You should only sell products you know are reliable, suitable for use by your clients, within your scope of practice, are a natural extension of your business and congruent with your image.

You must know all of your products well and convey that information to your clients. For instance, if your client really enjoyed the cervical hot pack you used during the session and wants to purchase one, you would educate the client how to use the pack and under what circumstances not to use it.

If you have a private practice or work in a group setting, you have control over what you sell and how you sell. This is usually not the case if you work in a spa or massage center. Many spas and massage centers require their practitioners to sell products.

The common expectation is massage therapists generate between 5 and 20 percent of their total sales in home-care products or supplies. (As a side note, most estheticians are required to generate upward of 50 percent.) Salaries, bonuses and seniority are often based on the amount of products sold.

This can cause problems. Therapists worry about being perceived as pushing unwanted products. They often feel they don't have enough time between sessions to sell products. They may have a lack of training in product knowledge and application. And some products might not be within the therapist's scope of practice.

Ideally, before taking a job at one of these establishments, clarify its product sales requirements and make sure you feel comfortable and confident in its product lines. If you currently work in such a setting and don't like the products, then talk with management. Offer input on the product lines so the company can carry items you feel comfortable selling. This makes it a win-win-win situation for you, the clients and the company.

Perhaps you can develop a different system so you don't feel like you are hawking products or rushed for time. Also, make sure you learn about all the products you are expected to sell. If training isn't provided, then

at least read the materials that accompany the products and research the items online.

If product sales are not handled well, they can negatively impact your practice. This is the major issue: Are you influenced more by the money that product sales generate, or are you selling products to clients because they need or want them? Exercise caution and check your motives to make certain you are not pushing a little harder because your income is down or because you are required to meet a targeted sales volume.

The Power Differential

The power differential is the key factor in ethical product sales. As a massage practitioner, a power differential exists between you and your clients. You are the authority figure whose actions, by virtue of your role, directly affects your clients' well-being. In massage, the power differential is amplified by the physical aspects of practice. Clients take a position—usually lying or sitting—in which they allow you access to their body. You position yourself within the client's physical space, often leaning over the client.

Furthermore, in massage, the client is partially or fully unclothed. Although draping is used for privacy, the psychological effect of the unclothed client and the clothed practitioner increases the imbalance of power. Finally, as your hands make physical contact with the client's body, the client's physical safety is literally in your hands.

The increased perception of the power differential in a massage session puts clients in a highly vulnerable position. They may feel uncomfortable about raising concerns or making requests. Clients may find it difficult to say *no* or refrain from communicating anything that could possibly be construed as negative for fear of reprisal or loss. Also, clients often assume you are the authority and may feel influenced to purchase products out of a need to please you or because they think you know best.

Reduce the possible abuse of the power differential by restricting your conversation about products to before or after sessions. It's fine to mention the product during a session, such as, "Now I am going to use XYZ product on you. If you are interested in learning more information about it, we can discuss it after the session."

The post-session interview is a good time to reference products. It is natural to recommend products that are appropriate to the client's goals when you are reviewing the treatment plan and any homework you might have for a client. This is also the time to ask for feedback on any of the products you used during the session.

Your Unique Position

Keep in mind your unique position as a massage therapist. You have a broad knowledge base about the body and what products can support clients in achieving their wellness goals. You have access to many superior products the average client is unable to purchase at a local store or even online. Also, some companies sell their products to practitioners but not the general public.

Most massage therapists spend at least one hour with each client. In that time, you really get to know your clients' needs. Plus, the longer a client has been working with you, the better informed you are to help and recommend appropriate products.

Clients like to get products from you and appreciate the convenience of purchasing from you. They expect you to know more about these products than they do and that you will choose the best ones for them.

Ultimately, selling products is no different than selling your services—simply share your enthusiasm about them. If you make your products visible, accessible, attractive and affordable, your clients will buy them when it is appropriate. M

Read "11 Things You Don't Know About Retail Sales," by Cherie Sohnen-Moe and Irene Diamond, R.T., at massagemag.com/11retail.