

Massage Therapy Today

Putting Knowledge into Practice

FOCUS ON BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

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Laura Fixman, Manager of Communications

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

What is Behind a Successful RMT's Practice?

As skilled health care professionals, RMTs are focused on ensuring their patients receive the best possible outcomes. However, this does not mean that crafting a viable business strategy and addressing logistical and financial concerns should fall by the wayside.

Whatever your goals, earning a comfortable living from your massage therapy practice will help you to continue doing what you love and ensure your patients' well-being. With that in mind, welcome to our summer issue! In these pages, we share expert practice-building advice that you can use during every step of your massage therapy journey.

Success depends very much on beginnings, so Chris Semenuk addresses common concerns and misconceptions that RMTs often have when starting a business. This advice gives you a solid foundation from which to build. Part of creating a sustainable practice is taking a look at the unique skills and experience you have to offer. Brad Cote therefore focuses on the importance of discovering your niche, especially when it comes to the ways in which you present and market yourself. There are many methods you can use to promote yourself in your community, from your website to word-of-mouth recommendations, e-mails and advertisements. One important, but sometimes overlooked, way to market your practice is through your presence on social media. Dylan Crake discusses how to professionally use social media platforms to connect with patients and colleagues, and grow your practice.

Although a large percentage of RMTs are independent contractors working in larger clinics, many RMTs work on their own. By working closely with other health professionals, whether they are in the same clinic or elsewhere, you will improve both your referral rate and the quality of your patient care. Dr. Erika Kuehnel, who is a dual registrant as an RMT and chiropractor, reviews the benefits of interprofessional collaboration in achieving positive clinical outcomes for patients.

Once you have built a successful practice, it is important to maintain that success. Retaining patients is at least as important as attracting new ones. On that topic, Don Dillon shares his tried-and-true strategies for improving patient retention.

A successful practice can mean different things to different RMTs. In general, however, most would agree that it includes earning a suitable income, having a steady flow of new patients and retaining your current patients. It is also about becoming a respected and integral member of your patients' circle of care.

While success is often measured in part by achieving the desired outcomes for patients, this issue of *Massage Therapy Today* will show you that there is so much more to consider.

Laura Fixman,
Manager of Communications

Practical Advice on Practice Retention

By Donald Q. Dillon,
RMT



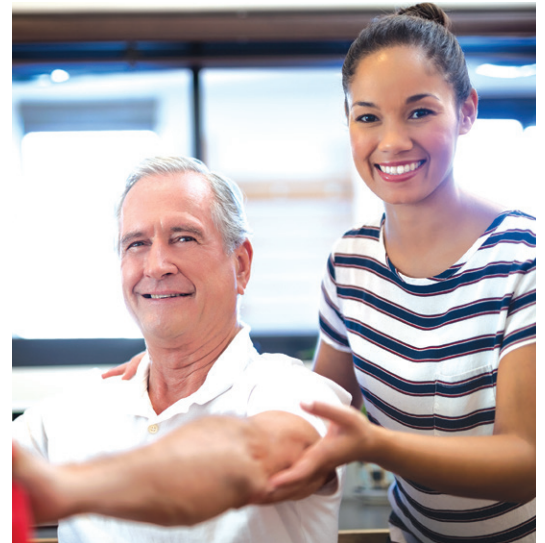
Donald Quinn Dillon, RMT, is a practitioner, practice coach and author of the self-study workbook *Charting Skills for Massage Therapists*. He has spoken at massage therapy conferences across Canada, and his articles have appeared in professional publications such as *Massage Therapy Canada*, *Massage Therapy Today*, *Massage Therapy Journal* (from the AMTA), and *Massage Therapist* (Australia). He produces the broadcast *On the Table* in conjunction with *Massage Therapy Canada* magazine/Annex Business Media. Dillon's website www.DonDillon-RMT.com provides a variety of resources for massage therapists.

I recently provided massage therapy care to a young woman, the fourth generation in a family I have been privileged to treat for decades. Her mother, aunts, grandmother and great-grandparents have all had appointments with me. How can a practitioner be awarded the trust not just of the original patient, but also of their friends and family? How can a practitioner be entrusted with the care of particular patients for decades? Not by accident, but by purposeful practice retention.

What is retention worth to a business? General Motors does not just want to sell you a car. If the company wins your trust and loyalty, that car could be worth \$400,000 in vehicle purchases, parts and services over your lifetime. One grocery chain has estimated that a loyal customer will make \$200,000 in purchases over 20 years, and well-known studies suggest that it takes five times the resources to acquire a new customer than to keep an existing one.

A quick calculation: If a patient attends your practice 12 times per year over 20 years to, at \$90 per session, then that patient's "life-time value" to your practice is \$21,600. I have patients who have invested in more than 200 sessions with me, despite more competitive pricing in town. And if your patient becomes an evangelist for your service—telling their friends and family—then that individual's life-time value to your practice skyrockets.

"Acquisition costs" are what you pay in advertising and promotional tactics to draw attention and get a prospective patient to try your services for the first time. If the trial does not lead to a long-standing relationship, or if a regular patient drops your services in favour



of another practitioner, that is called "churn." If you churn more patients than you retain, your acquisition costs will claim much of your profits. But, if you can continue relationships then you will not need to chase as many new patients. It therefore makes sense to invest heavily in serving and retaining the patients you have.

So, pragmatically, how do you retain more of your patients for the long run?

Connect

Use your existing relationship with patients to educate, expand their awareness of your scope and engender confidence. Reconnecting on a regular basis keeps you top of mind whenever they experience stress, strain or pain. One of the best ways to do this is to issue a regular newsletter. A newsletter is a tremendous retention tool: It is a regular reminder of you and your services, can include quick tips and informational pieces to grow your scope of

practice in your patients' minds, and should be esthetically pleasing with photos and colour fonts (and video links if electronic)... all delivered in digestible chunks at a fairly low per-patient cost. Once a person has experienced your care, they will typically be open to receiving more comprehensive communications from you.

I recommend supplementing a monthly short electronic newsletter with a quarterly or semi-annual print version. Some of your patients will be more tactile, or of the generations prior to the ubiquity of the internet, and will prefer to physically hold your communication in their hands. Getting personalized mail is now a novelty!

Services such as Constant Contact or Mailchimp can deliver your newsletter electronically, inexpensively and frequently. With electronic newsletters, be aware of anti-spam legislation (review at <https://fightspam.gc.ca>) and ensure you have proper permission from your patients before sending anything promotional.

Other ways to connect include confirming appointments by phone, e-mail or text the day before (also a great way to avoid missed or confused appointments) and sending patients news items or other resources of interest to confirm you are listening and they matter.

Initiate

If a regular patient has not booked an appointment in a while, initiate a call. Although you may have told them about the treatment plan and how many treatments you think would be beneficial, they may not have booked that many treatments because they did not have time or simply forgot or became distracted by something else. You can say: "Sally, I know you prefer Tuesday afternoon appointments and I have availability this coming Tuesday at 3 pm. I know life can get busy, so I wanted to reach out. Would you like the 3 pm appointment on Tuesday?" Patients will usually respond, "Yes, I'm so glad you called. Work/personal life has been crazy busy lately. Please book me in." Or "I can't come Tuesday, but how about Wednesday?"

In fact, you can find a lot of "lost business" by surveying your appointment book regularly. Patients can become caught up in the demands of their lives, and health and well-being needs shift to the backburner. If you initiate the connection, they will thank you for it. Rebooking is not only good for your business, but is an important part of a strong treatment plan for your patients.

Here is another way to initiate. When you come to the end of a treatment plan—when a patient's confidence in you is at its maximum—invite them to refer others. "If you've benefitted from my care, would you consider passing my business cards onto others in need?" Provide them with three business cards. Their trust, extended to others, is the best endorsement you can have.

Respond

If possible, create space in your day for patients requiring urgent care. I encourage my patients to call if they are in acute agony. If I cannot see them for a full appointment then I can probably intervene for 20 minutes at the day's end to get them out of the discomfort zone. If providing urgent care is not possible for you, secure alternatives such as local practitioners available on the same day or next day, or recommend self-massage regimens with an acuBall/tennis ball or home

“Use your existing relationship with patients to educate, expand their awareness of your scope and engender confidence. Reconnecting on a regular basis keeps you top of mind whenever they experience stress, strain or pain.”



“On a regular basis, ask your patients for feedback in the form of a short survey. Set up a five-question survey (SurveyMonkey is great for this) to gain insight into the things your patients do not say in their sessions with you.”

hydrotherapy applications to take the edge off your patient's pain and help them endure until their next appointment with you.

Expand

Find ways to grow your capacity and efficacy through learning, training and exchanging. Practitioners who efficiently evoke desirable outcomes become the go-to person when the patient—and their circle of friends—has their next bout of pain, distress or physical impairment. Expand the populations you serve and the conditions you address. Distinguish yourself through your knowledge, prowess, connections, availability on evenings or weekends, teaching remedial exercises and so on. Stand up and stand out.

RMTAO member Rob Haddow has produced a series of videos to assist his patients in performing exercises at home to improve their flexibility, mobility and strength, while reducing their pain and imbuing them with a sense of agency over their body's complaints. Rob inspired me to produce my own short videos for my patients during the first wave of the COVID pandemic, so I could help patients reduce the ill-effects of inactivity and missing their usual massage therapy session during that time.

Educate

Become skilled in clearly explaining the causes of your patient's angst (the problem), how it is manifesting in the body (symptoms) and what you will do to address it (the solution). Use metaphors, anatomical models and charts, and digital references to instill an understanding of the problem, and commit to work with the patient to overcome it. Newsletters, as previously mentioned, expand your depth and breadth of practice in the minds of your patients, while providing information to help them positively affect their health and well-being.

Enshrine

What creates a safe, warm, comfortable therapy space? What values and qualities do you bring to the session, both personally and professionally? How are those values enshrined in the space, and how do they contribute posi-

tively to the patient's experience? The design of your practice and delivery of care should be carefully considered and planned out, not left to chance. Regularly review all aspects of your practice to ensure it reflects your values and meets the expectations of your patients.

Survey

Consider these methods to fast-track your learning and provide a consistently qualitative experience every time:

- Examine every aspect of your delivery-of-care model: (1) Attracting new patients; (2) the intake process; (3) assessment; (4) treatment; (5) measuring outcomes; (6) prescribing self-care; and (7) follow-up. Critique the pathway. What processes are working well? What can you improve upon?
- Exchange with other practitioners. Observe how they package the patient experience. Ask for feedback on your care when they are the recipient.
- Offer three confidantes a session in exchange for their detailed feedback. Pick people who will be constructively candid.

On a regular basis, ask your patients for feedback in the form of a short survey. Set up a five-question survey (SurveyMonkey is great for this) to gain insight into the things your patients do not say in their sessions with you. Each quarter, I survey every patient I have seen for a month or longer. The survey lands in their e-mail or text the same day, with the following questions:

- 1) What outcomes were you seeking today?
[Four options]
- 2) Thinking about your desired outcome today, how much better do you feel? [Same, better, much better, not better/worse]
- 3) Remember how you felt before starting care. How much better overall do you feel today? [sliding scale of 0–100%]
- 4) Did you experience any beneficial results you were not expecting? If so, what?
[Open text box]
- 5) Do you have anything to add in helping me provide you the very best care?
[Open text box]

You cannot comprehend the experience of your patients fully unless you ask them to describe it. Use the information you receive to hone your abilities in delivering an exceptional experience.

Re-serve

When you reserve space for someone, you honour them. They feel valued and attended to. To re-serve is to “serve again,” investing deeper in your professional relationship in a progressive and contextual way.

Beyond the patient’s initial complaint, find out why else they have come to see you. A case history is rarely complete in one sitting. Every session provides a chance to learn more about the person. You may hear—“My jaw clicks/is painful,” “I forgot to mention my knee pain last time” or “I was injured in a car accident 20 years ago. Is that related to my symptoms now?” This is an opportunity to up-serve—to address more of the patient’s

health concerns and exceed their expectations. Maintain a referral network to serve your patients comprehensively in their health and well-being objectives. Work on deepening your care relationship over time.

Conclusion

Keep your patients coming back by connecting regularly, initiating their next appointment, responding when they are in urgent need, expanding your repertoire of skills, educating them on the efficacy of your care, enshrining your values and their expectations in the experience, surveying patients to comprehend their experience, and re-serving them to provide more comprehensive care. ■

Further reading

See *Massage Therapy Today*, July 2010, “21+ Ways to Attract and Retain Business” for additional ideas on practice retention.

“Offer three confidantes a session in exchange for their detailed feedback. Pick people who will be constructively candid.”



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How to Use Social Media to Grow your Practice

By Dylan Crake,
RMT, R.Kin



Dylan Crake, RMT, R.Kin, graduated from the massage therapy program at Algonquin College in June 2019 and officially became an RMT in August 2019. Before this, she worked as a registered kinesiologist and completed her Master of Science focusing on activities of daily living and older adults. She is currently working at Whole Therapy in Ottawa as both an RMT and an R.Kin, where she focuses on helping her clients to move without pain through massage and exercise. Follow her on Instagram @dylan.dynamic.rmt, where she posts daily rehab-oriented exercises.



I did not know the power social media held until I became an RMT. Back when I was in college studying massage therapy, social media was almost frowned upon. Students were always being told to be careful of what they posted and to keep an invisible presence online. What was not mentioned during those all-important lectures was the difference between professional and personal social media use. Professional social media—done the right way—can, after all, help your business grow.

When using social media, you should keep in mind the Standards of Practice and privacy laws that govern you as a health care professional. You can not share any personal health information on your social media channels, and you should be mindful of using social media ethically and professionally. You should also consider the CMTO's

advertising policy, which affects what you post on social media. However, you should not be scared of posting to promote your business.

When I was being interviewed for a position at my current clinic, the owner asked me: "How are you with social media?" I was unsure how to answer that question because of the negative approach we had been taught in school. However, I answered truthfully and said I knew the ins and outs of how to post. The owner was pleased to hear it. Once I received that "push," I started using social media to grow both my practice and my network through educational and relatable posts.

So, if you are still "iffy" about social media, unsure of which platforms to use or do not know where to start or how to use it to grow your practice, I am here to share what I have learned.

Much of this information is covered in the RMTAO Social Media Toolkit. The toolkit provides advice on how to post on social media successfully, tips about what to post and insights into planning your social media efforts. I would recommend requesting this guide from the RMTAO website as a starting point for growing your social media presence.

Figure out your goal

The first step is to figure out your goal behind your social media account. Why do you want one? Is it to attract new patients? To help your current patients? To educate the public on exercises and muscles? Or maybe to network with like-minded peers? All of these are great goals. For myself, the aim of my posts is to provide my followers with value through educational material that is fun and straightforward. Once you have narrowed that down your goals, the next step is to determine how they can provide value for your followers.

When I was starting to plan my social media pages, I sat down and wrote out my goals. I then came up with themes that aligned with those goals and figured out something I could post every single day for a month. I did not do all this in one day! I spent a month planning before I even considered launching my page, because I am a planner and I like to plan.

Pick a platform

Once you have determined what your goals are for your social media pages and you have sat down and planned everything out, you have to decide which social media platforms to use. Different platforms are better for different forms of posts. For example, Instagram is good for short videos or pictures with minimal captions and a lot of hashtags. People do not read longer paragraphs on Instagram—but they do on Facebook and LinkedIn. If you enjoy writing more than being in front of the camera, Facebook or LinkedIn will be the way to go. If you like being in front of the camera and can get out information in less than two minutes, Instagram is the platform for you.

There is also TikTok, which is all about trends that go away as quick as they come, portrayed in just 60 seconds. TikTok's reach is amazing and you have the ability to link it back to your other social media platforms. However, when it comes to TikTok, because you are reaching a wider base, be aware that you might not necessarily be attracting new patients. But it is nonetheless a great way to educate people about massage and movement, and even to network with other RMTs around the world.

Maintain consistency

After you have determined which social media platforms to use, it is important to be consistent with your posts on all your chosen platforms. Again, planning can be your friend when it comes to social media posts, because you can come up with themes of the month and even themes for particular days of the week. For example, I post self-massage tutorials every Wednesday and "Minute of Muscles" every Friday. In May, I found many of my patients were coming in with hip and low back pain, so I made this the main focus of my self-massage tutorials and muscle education. Planning and coming up with themes means you will be less overwhelmed with posting and you will be able to keep up with trends you see in your own treatment room.

When you are consistent with your social media posts, your name and content will consistently pop up on people's feeds. This leads to more connections among potential patients and peers. However, even though

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“If you create a “perfect” social media persona then you will be bringing people into your networking circle who do not really know the real you, and it can be tiring to maintain a facade.”

consistency is great, if you start to feel overwhelmed by the number of posts you feel the need to make—stop posting. Although it is a great tool with which to build your business, social media is not worth getting stressed about. Your mental health is far more important. Remember: If it becomes too much of a struggle then the quality of your posts will suffer.

Gain followers

Now that you are consistently posting content on social media, how do you engage with your followers and how can you gain more followers (which will lead to more potential patients and networking connections)? That is easy—be yourself!

Most people that you will want to interact and network with will be drawn to you, as a person. If you create a “perfect” social media persona then you will be bringing people into your networking circle who do not really know the real you, and it can be tiring to maintain a facade. Do not worry about being perfect. Make mistakes and laugh at yourself, because that is how you will get a network of followers who you actually want to interact with. It is how you will attract new patients and build your network of like-minded health professionals. All because you are being YOU!

Try new themes

Next, remember that it is okay to change up your social media. Maybe you do not want to post exercises every day. Maybe your self-massage tutorials are getting fewer views on a certain day of the week. Maybe it is becoming too stressful to think of new mobility challenges every week. If so, change it up.

You can still consistently post while changing up the content of your social media posts. This is why I vary my theme each month. It creates new material and prevents staleness in your feed. If something is not working for you regarding social media, try something new! What is the worse that can happen? Nothing. So do not be afraid to change your social media posts, because you can reach new people when you do!

Reach out


It helps to follow the people who inspire you and even to reach out to them. Ask them questions and start a discussion. Asking one simple question can lead to a connection being formed with a peer. As a side note, something I did not realize until I started writing for the RMTAO was that the massage therapy community is really quite small. So, do not be afraid to get your name out there and talk to people. If you ever have any questions for me, shoot me a message through my e-mail or Instagram and I will get back to you. And look—you have just networked!

In college, networking to me meant going out into a group of people I did not know and making small talk. That did not seem appealing, especially as an introvert. Then I realized that social media is a great networking tool to find like-minded peers and, all of a sudden, I was not as nervous to meet others in my field (virtually, at least). I have now connected with massage therapists from California all the way to Portugal. It has been amazing to see how the profession is viewed in those places and how everyone has been affected by the pandemic.

Five-step overview

Here is my five-step overview on growing your practice and networking through social media:

- 1 Determine your goals for social media and how you can provide value through your posts.
- 2 Decide which platforms you want to use to grow your patient base and network (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok).
- 3 Be consistent in your posts—in other words, plan and follow through on that plan.
- 4 Be yourself. Post content that reflects your personality.
- 5 Be open to changing your content when it is no longer performing.

Although social media is a good way to build a network, it is still very valuable to connect in person. So, on one final note: When we are all able to network in person again, I cannot wait to meet all of you who I have had the pleasure of connecting with virtually. 

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How to Use Interprofessional Collaboration

By Dr. Erika Kuehnel, DC, CMAG, RMT

Interprofessional collaboration is an enormous contributor to a successful massage therapy practice. Before we go any further, I think it is important to discuss what defines “interprofessional collaboration” and “successful practice,” as the meaning of these terms will vary from person to person.

For the purposes of this discussion, “interprofessional collaboration” implies people from two or more different professions working together toward a common goal. This approach is more likely to be used to address complex challenges, where a more diverse knowledge base or skill set is required.

“Successful practice” is a more elusive term, as the definition of success will be unique to the individual and likely to change over time. A successful massage therapy practice may include, but is not limited to:

- **positive clinical outcomes for patients**—resolution or management of symptoms, prompt referral to other health care professionals (HCPs) as necessary, and improved patient understanding through education
- **quality of life for the RMT**—financial stability, and an income sufficient to maintain a good quality of life and achieve (the ever-elusive) work–life balance
- **professional development for the RMT**—favourable working conditions and opportunities for recognition, reward, connection, growth and education

With these descriptions in mind, let us consider how interprofessional collaboration may present in a massage therapy practice and how it can contribute to success.



Positive patient outcomes

The contribution of interprofessional collaboration to patient outcomes is perhaps the easiest of these three points to envision, and the most likely to apply across a wide variety of practice environments. Working with providers from different health care disciplines is common in massage therapy practice. Many RMTs are co-located with other manual therapists, such as chiropractors and physiotherapists; health and wellness professionals, such as naturopaths; and mental health professionals, such as psychotherapists and counsellors. Less commonly, RMTs may be in communication with members of the patient’s health care team with whom they are not co-located, such as their patient’s primary care provider or other specialists. This list is long and will vary as much as the RMT’s practice, but might include rheumatologists, orthopedists, chronic pain specialists, oncologists, palliative care specialists and neurologists.



Erika Kuehnel, DC, CMAG, RMT, is a chiropractor and RMT who operates a multidisciplinary clinic in Milton, Ontario. She is also an advanced practice provider with Trillium Health Partners’ Low Back Pain Rapid Access Clinic and an RMTAO Board Member.

When our patients are discussing treatment planning with other HCPs involved in their care, they will often seek recommendations about the role of massage therapy. This is a partially due to access to care being based on public funding (OHIP coverage), but is also related to cultural authority. Patients expect their primary care provider or specialist to understand what constitutes massage therapy. In practice, RMTs know that this “understanding” is frequently flawed. Given the diversity of massage therapy as an intervention, and the lack of education about massage therapy and RMTs received by other HCPs, it is no wonder that erroneous assumptions are made or that other HCPs have an incomplete picture of what massage therapy can include.

Collaboration with other HCPs should therefore include providing detailed information on your treatment approach, the rationale used to arrive at your treatment plan and how massage therapy will integrate with other aspects of the patient’s care. There are several benefits of a collaborative approach.

- The other HCP will gain the benefit of your time with the patient. We spend more time with our patients than most other HCPs, and they disclose different information to us as a result. This information can help to form a better understanding of your patient’s presentation.
- The other HCP will understand the massage therapy treatment plan proposed for this patient at this time, and how massage therapy will complement the other planned therapeutic interventions.
- The patient will receive consistent messaging about the role of massage therapy, its safety and its appropriateness for their specific presentation.

In addition to providing treatment for a patient already under another HCP’s care, an RMT might want to initiate a collaboration with another HCP. RMTs are direct access/primary care providers in Ontario. Although we cannot initiate referrals for OHIP-funded care or to secondary care providers, we certainly can and should advise patients, where appropriate, to

consult with other primary care HCPs and ask the patient’s permission to provide that HCP with relevant information. Examples of times when you might wish to consult further include:

- consultation with another HCP when the patient presents with a condition outside of our scope (e.g., seeking the services of a mental health professional when suspicious of anxiety or depression)
- returning to the patient’s primary care provider to discuss additional referrals or investigations, such as radiographs, bloodwork or specialty consultation (e.g., if a patient’s presentation is suspicious for rheumatoid arthritis)
- consultation with other providers when our skill set is unlikely to result in complete resolution or fulsome management of their complaint (e.g., lumbar disc herniation with radiculopathy/neuropathic pain)
- prompt referral of patients with medical emergencies or urgency (e.g., cauda equina syndrome, signs of stroke or red flags suggestive of infection/neoplasm)

Recommending patients consult with other HCPs, and communicating with those HCPs yourself, ensures that patients who are unlikely to improve with your care alone quickly receive the treatment they need and helps to avoid emergencies in your office. In addition, you are more likely to receive follow-up information on

“Given the diversity of massage therapy as an intervention, and the lack of education about massage therapy and RMTs received by other HCPs, it is no wonder that erroneous assumptions are made or that other HCPs have an incomplete picture of what massage therapy can include.”



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“Building a relationship with another local HCP now may yield referrals for many years, and making relationship-building part of your day-to-day practice will result in a self-perpetuating source of new patients in the long term.”

your patient if you can effectively communicate with the other HCP.

Receiving information from another treating HCP can result in improved patient outcomes by allowing you to better tailor your massage therapy to the patient's condition, stage of management and changing health status. It can also help to inform treatment goals and set realistic expectations for the provider and patient alike. This approach serves also to inform and educate the RMT about available options for their most difficult-to-treat patients.

RMT quality of life

When discussing improved clinical outcomes for patients, one cannot help but think that this will improve other elements of practice. From a financial perspective, collaborating with other HCPs can lead to increased patient referrals, reduced marketing costs and a more sustainable practice. Patients who feel cared for and who have positive experiences are likely to recommend you to friends and family. In addition, primary care providers and specialists with whom you have communicated are more likely to recommend your services—particularly if your interaction helped them in their treatment planning.

We need only think of how we would answer a patient who asks if they should visit a physiotherapist or chiropractor in conjunction with their massage therapy treatment plan. Are we more likely to say yes in general—or to recommend a particular person with whom we previously had a positive interaction? Many RMTs do not often reach out to other providers; and those who do hear back from those providers with even less frequency. But that does not mean they are not listening or paying attention. In a world of pay-per-click advertising, word of mouth remains a cost-effective form of marketing that can not only help to build your practice, but which has dividends that continue to pay long after the initial investment.

Building a relationship with another local HCP now may yield referrals for many years, and making relationship-building part of your day-to-day practice will result in a self-perpetu-

ating source of new patients in the long term. Regular, concise and relevant communication and collaboration with other HCPs will not only build your reputation, but also result in a better selection of patient referrals. If other providers have a good understanding of what you do, they are more likely to recommend to you those patients who are likely to benefit from your care.

When your practice is highly regarded and recommended, several wonderful things occur—all of which result in an improved quality of life and practice.

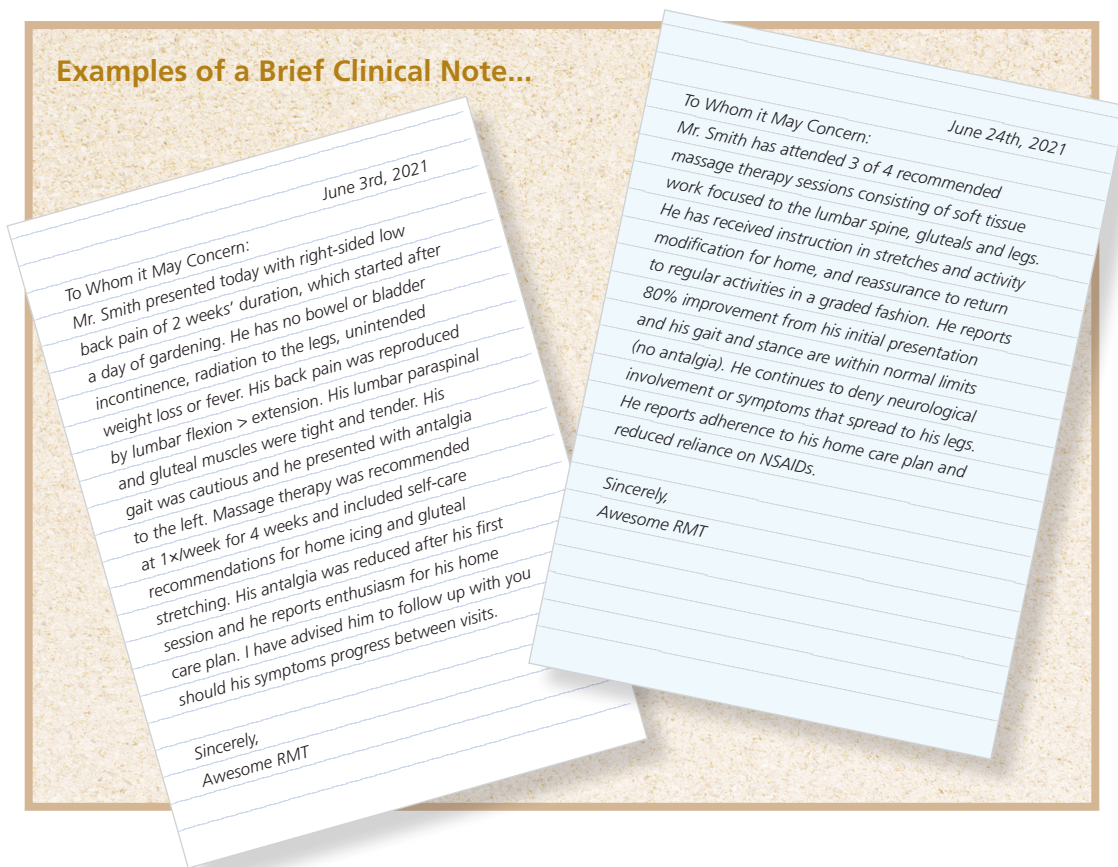
- Your practice is more likely to be regularly full and efficiently scheduled. If you are in demand, patients are more likely to work around your schedule, less likely to no-show or late cancel, and more likely to wait for an appointment with you.
- Your practice is sustainable. Less effort is required to attract new patients to replace those whose condition resolves or who leave the practice. This leaves you free to concentrate on your patients more and on practice marketing less.
- Because your services are in highly sought after, you are able to charge the rate you need to cover your expenses and ensure sufficient income, instead of competing with others on price. Your patients will understand the value of your care and be willing to pay for it.

When your practice is full and your income sufficient, you have the capacity to engage in activities that provide you with work-life balance or reward you in other ways.

Professional development

Treating patients who achieve successful clinical outcomes, in a self-sustaining practice where you have good quality of life, sounds like a great deal. However, there is another element to professional practice, without which I personally would not feel satisfied. I will refer to this as professional development. Much like “success,” the definition of professional development is unique to each of us, but may include connecting with peers and colleagues, continuing your education, becoming aware

Examples of a Brief Clinical Note...



of the approaches of other HCPs, engaging in non-clinical roles (e.g. teaching, research or professional services) or developing a specifically focused practice involving niche settings or populations.

I enjoy clinical practice immensely. It supports me financially and I feel all kinds of pride and joy when my patients see positive results and I know that I have contributed. However, my most rewarding activities as an HCP have nothing to do with my patients. In my nine years as an RMT I have had the good fortune to teach, advocate for the profession, contribute to governance and run a multidisciplinary practice in addition to my own clinical practice. I feel no greater joy than seeing those around me succeed, knowing that I contributed to the environment in which they have been successful. This applies to an educational environment, my practice and the profession at large within the health care landscape in Ontario. My participation in these activities and connection to others is an integral part of my definition of success. What would your definition include?

Conclusion

None of us practice in a vacuum. Our patients consult with other HCPs on a regular basis. RMTs frequently lament that other HCPs do not understand all that we can do, or that we are underappreciated, but few of us take action to change the status quo. It can feel intimidating, but after 14 years as a regulated health care professional and participating in an OHIP-funded program in which I communicate with other HCPs on a regular basis, I can assure you that it does not need to be! The RMTAO has a great detailed guide for members to help you through the interprofessional collaboration processes, but here are three simple points to remember:

- 1 Provide the essential details you would want to know.
- 2 Keep communication concise and relevant.
- 3 Communicate often, especially when the information will impact clinical decision-making.

Try it once. Likely you will not see much happen. But if you can make it a habit, I can assure you the rewards are great. ■

“In a world of pay-per-click advertising, word of mouth remains a cost-effective form of marketing that can not only help to build your practice, but which has dividends that continue to pay long after the initial investment.”

Creating a Niche to Market Your Practice

By Brad Cote, RMT, DOMP

Starting out in your own practice can be both incredibly exciting and very overwhelming. Being able to treat in the specific way you want and have control over how you run your business, the patients you work with and the income you can make is certainly empowering. But on the other hand are the sometimes daunting logistics of how to begin, find new patients, grow your business and make enough money to sustain your lifestyle. It is also important to find ways to reinvest in yourself and continue your education to ensure you get the best results possible for your patients.

In this article I discuss how to build your business and attract patients, while getting amazing patient results.

Find your niche

One of the most rewarding things you can do as a health practitioner is to be unique in your marketplace positioning and create a specific niche for yourself. This will allow you to highlight your skills, differentiate yourself from other health practitioners and position yourself relative to the specific issue needing to be resolved or treated.

For example, a person suffering from low back pain might book an appointment with a number of health practitioners: maybe a chiropractor, massage therapist, osteopath or acupuncturist. Or they could simply take a painkiller, use a foam roller or apply a heat patch.

Because of this range of treatment options, patients often get confused. But by creating a niche, an RMT speak can speak clearly to their skills and the patient's possible outcomes. After all, one of the most important



things to understand about business and marketing is that people buy solutions, not services. When you compete on the service level, you are competing with a variety of health care practitioners, along with a long list pain-relieving products.

During your training, you will have seen many different types of patients in student clinics. You will have been exposed to seniors, younger people and athletes, and many different medical conditions. During this process, you will hopefully have developed an understanding of who you like working with the most. Generally, you will resonate with one segment of the population, or with a particular condition or goal. And, as you gain experience in practice, you will become more passionate and interested in working with those specific populations or conditions. This is the beginning of developing a niche.

It is important to choose a niche that you are passionate about—a population



Brad Cote, RMT, DOMP, is dual licensed health practitioner and successful clinic owner. He is the founder of Link Performance Therapy, a successful private practice with a focus on athletes. He grew his clinic's revenue from zero to seven figures within 18 months of operation using a combination of proven structures, systems and strategies that he now shares with health care business owners across North America. Find out more about increasing your business at bradcote.com.

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“Once you have pinpointed your ideal patient, and the problems you want to solve for them, your next step is to create a clear marketing message.”

who you really want to serve and, ultimately, build your business around. That way, you never feel like you are working. Instead, you will feel as if you are getting paid to do something you truly love and enjoy.

For example, I love working with athletes on performance and preventing injuries. When I started out I began to work with active adults, such as those weight training in the gym. As time went on, I focussed on higher-level sports people, and eventually I worked exclusively with national-level athletes for around 2.5 years.

Look for your best fit

So how do you find that passion? My suggestion: List all the patients you have seen, together with their conditions and goals, and highlight those who resonated with you the most. If you are not quite sure then you might need more time to find the best fit—

and that is totally okay.

This can be a difficult activity because, as practitioners, we can get into the mindset of: I really just need to treat everyone who comes through the door in order to grow my business. That is simply not true. This thinking is rooted in a scarcity mindset that results from vague marketing messaging that says nothing to everyone and makes it difficult for patients to know if you are the right fit for them.

Magnetic messaging

Once you have pinpointed your ideal patient, and the problems you want to solve for them, your next step is to create a clear marketing message.

First, describe that ideal patient who you are passionate about and skilled in helping. You also want to make sure your patients have the resources to be able to follow through on their plan of care. This does not necessarily mean financial resources, but also includes having the motivation to execute homework and the ability to follow through on other recommendations needed to get the patient the solution they are looking for.

The next step is to position yourself. Clearly outline the solutions and outcomes that you provide instead of just talking about your services. For example, a person dealing with chronic neck and shoulder pain does not lie awake at night thinking, “I need to get my massage.” They are

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thinking, “I need to get over this neck and shoulder pain so I can sleep.” They are looking for the outcome of pain relief, so that they can get back to living life on their own terms.

As I mentioned earlier, health care practitioners’ marketing messages tend to be positioned around the services and modalities they offer or the conditions they treat. The unfortunate reality is that most patients do not understand the difference between health care services (e.g. physiotherapy, massage therapy, chiropractic) let alone different modalities, such as stretching, cupping, active release therapy or acupuncture.

Because of this, patients often have a hard time determining which option is best for them. They generally end up going to the practice that is closest to their home or work or looking for a service they read about online or that a friend talked about, and which might not actually be the best choice for them. This is how patients can get stuck without relief, sometimes for years, and even give up on finding a treatment that works for them—all tied to the fact that they are using the wrong service or product.

Reflecting solutions

When you modify your marketing message to reflect the solutions and outcomes that your services and modalities provide, this will resonate with patients who are looking for those outcomes and match them with your messaging. It makes it easier for the patient to choose your practice and understand how you can best help them, so that they will then be invested in the process of getting a better result. This often means a substantially higher commitment to booking a plan of care, engaging with homework and following any other recommendations you might make, which in turn means your patient will achieve a better result—and will then recommend you to colleagues, family members and friends.

After you have perfected your marketing message—speaking to the outcomes you can provide—the next step is to get your message out there. Health care practitioners often go wrong by focusing primarily on word of mouth and other referral sources,

which are often inconsistent, unpredictable and a challenging way to grow your business.

Handle your marketing and positioning within your community from an omnipresent perspective—in other words, be seen everywhere. There are multiple ways to achieve this.

Organic marketing

First, consider using organic marketing methods, such as establishing partnerships with collaborative local businesses in relationships that provide value to all parties.

You can think about this as being like buying a barbecue. You are super-excited to have an amazing feast when you get the barbecue home. However, you are setting yourself up for disappointment if you fail to purchase the items needed for the rest of the experience, such as fuel, food and plates. Your business is very similar.

There are certain things that will have happened before a patient comes to your practice. For example, a person might sustain an injury while working out with a personal trainer, and

“When you modify your marketing message to reflect the solutions and outcomes that your services and modalities provide, this will resonate with patients who are looking for those outcomes.”



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“Paid advertisements are the fastest way to grow your practice, but you can spend a lot of money and get poor results if you have not first tested your offers, messaging and positioning.”



come to you to get them back to the gym. And after using your service, another patient might want to go running. In these contexts, you could start joint venture partnerships with local personal trainers and running stores. These are both are joint ventures that I have set up successfully to grow my own solo practices as well as clinics. If you want a resource on how to effectively set up joint ventures, please visit my website, bradcote.com where you can download my joint venture worksheet.

Organic marketing methods are great when you are first starting out, as they provide proof of concept for your marketing message and positioning setup. Paid advertisements are the fastest way to grow your practice, but you can spend a lot of money and get poor results if you have not first tested your offers, messaging and positioning.

Digital marketing

When starting out, digital marketing is one of the most effective methods of promoting your business. Facebook and Google advertisements are extremely cheap for the amount of reach you can get. For just a few dollars a day, you can access thousands of people with your messaging and offers. If those offers and messaging are dialed in properly then you can generate a significant

amount of new business from patients who stay, pay and refer.

A large component of an advertisement's success is understanding the role it plays and the results you expect. Too often people put out an offer on a discounted therapy service, expecting people to come in. However, if your offer is not positioned properly then you will end up attracting the wrong type of buyers—referred to as “tire kickers” or “discount chasers”—which can be extremely frustrating. Take some time to create offers that work for your practice and focus on the solutions you can offer. If you are looking for inspiration, you can use my advertisements that I've used in my own clinics, which I've shared on my website.

Focus on retention

Lastly, one of the most effective ways to grow your business is to retain the patients you currently have and generate referrals from those who are happy with the results. One of my favourite marketing campaigns is the nine-word e-mail. Here, the goal is to get past patients and prospects to rebook with you. This nine-word e-mail does not necessarily need to be nine words—but it must be short and personal, and expect a reply:

*Hey John,
I've got an opening in my schedule for you next week! Would you like a massage?*

I tend to run these every 4–6 weeks and often fill 10–15 appointments each time. So do not underestimate the power of the nine-word e-mail.

Growing your own practice can be empowering, lucrative and fun. But it also can be stressful. However, if you follow the basic steps above—discover your niche, create your marketing message, and expand your marketing campaigns using organic, paid and retention methods—then you will have amazing success and a more fulfilling practice.

Remember, people buy solutions, not services. Focus on the outcomes and success will follow. ■

Business 101... What to Consider When Starting a Business

By **Chris Semenuk, RMT**

When we leave massage therapy school, most of us have only a rudimentary understanding of the business side of the practice. Yes, we have gained some great base skills with which to help our patients; however, most of us lack the necessary understanding of running a business in the manual therapy world. This is evident from the questions to more seasoned RMTs in Ontario posed on various social media groups.

In this article, I take a look at some of the basics and address common questions asked by newer RMTs, as well as those wishing to learn more after some time in practice.

Negotiate

A very common misconception is that a contract for self-employment is a “take-it-or-leave-it” kind of document. This is simply not true. Any contract for self-employment is negotiable.

In simple terms, one business is offering another business a place to practice from. In return, the contracted business is offering its services to the one with a place to share. Both are bringing something valuable to the proposed relationship. So, both can ask for things and both can concede things.

Red flags to look for when presented with a contract include the following.

■ **Feeling rushed:** If there is a sense of urgency—“Sign it today or I will ask someone else”—then be prepared to move on. This is an indicator of how the business relationship may continue. Any reasonable potential partner will make sure you have



time to read the contract thoroughly or take it home to review.

- **Too small a contract:** Contracts that are just one or two pages will simply not cover enough information to ensure a quality business arrangement. See later in this article for some of the items needed for a good contract.
- **No ability to make changes:** As I said above, all contracts are negotiable. Whether they are agreed in the end or not, both parties have the right to request changes and clarifications.
- **Lacking cancellation details:** A good contract should include full information on cancellation in a termination clause.



Chris Semenuk, RMT, has been treating patients since 2001 in the St. Thomas and London area. As well as teaching massage therapy, he has certifications in laser therapy, SpiderTech Kinesio-tape, TENS, ultrasound and ETFS.

“A “termination clause” is not a negative thing in a contract; it is a positive part of your arrangement.

It sets out the agreed roles of each individual and “rules” for what must occur.”

What happens if the relationship ends?

All business relationships end. This might be through natural retirement at the conclusion of a very long relationship or, at the other extreme, a bridge-burning blow-up. Thus, we all need to plan for the inevitable. It is best to do this before signing any agreements, when everything is “positive” between the parties and level-headed discussions are proceeding.

A “termination clause” is not a negative thing in a contract; it is a positive part of your arrangement. It sets out the agreed roles of each individual and “rules” for what must occur. These might include courtesy items such as re-painting the room, clarification on who owns the signage, and details of when to turn in the keys, changes to the security code and when the business should be removed from the website.

In addition, there will be more formal items that need to be discussed ahead of time. The first formal items that should be addressed in writing are those required



by the CMTO. Regulations suggest that there must be a system for contacting patients to advise them of where their personal information is being kept (i.e., where will their files be). Furthermore, patients who require ongoing care must be presented with a plan for continuity—whether that means someone else taking over their case or them seeing you at a different location. Not providing this continuity is seen by the CMTO as abandonment, which is considered misconduct.

The Personal Health Information Privacy Act (PHIPA) requires patient files to be maintained by a custodian who is a medical professional under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA).¹ In this case, that means files must be maintained by the RMT. So, a site such as a spa or salon that will not have a medical professional present when you leave cannot be assigned custodianship of patient files.

You need to make this clear from day one, and emphasize that it is required by law. If there is a medical professional present, this person should be clearly designated as the custodian and you should be assigned all rights of access as required by the RHPA, the *Massage Therapy Act* and the CMTO, for the full 10 years or until that person is 28 years old (in the case of patients treated as children).² Alternatively, the RMT may



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retain possession of the records themselves or make arrangements for another custodian to assume this responsibility.

What is the going “split” rate?

This question comes up frequently, not just from new graduates but also from more experienced RMTs. There seems to be some confusion over what an RMT is “supposed to get” as remuneration. Well, the answer is simple: There isn’t one. While you may have been told in school to expect 60% or 70%, there is a bit more to it.

The first question to ask is: “A percentage of what?” Consider, 70% of \$90 is \$63, while 50% of \$150 is \$75. So, a person working for 50% can make more per treatment than another individual working for 70%. The percentage is not the be all and end all.

Look at the real numbers and ask questions.

The next consideration is: “How much

work is there?” It is great to make that \$75 per session compared with \$63, but if you only see four people a week it will work out to \$15,600 a year (based on 52 weeks with no vacations). The person getting \$63 each session may see 20 people a week and thus be lined up to make \$65,520 a year. So, a word to the wise—consider your annual earning potential as well as the split.

What does your rent split get you?

The value of what you are paying for is often overlooked. The first step is to understand the base rent. In Toronto \$36 per square foot per year can be normal, whereas in Chatham \$12 might be the norm. That means that the Toronto lease of space can be expected to be three times as much as in Chatham. An RMT must factor this value into their decision.

Second, what “extras” are there? Each thing added to what the rent split covers is

“Patients who require ongoing care must be presented with a plan for continuity—whether that means someone else taking over their case or them seeing you at a different location.”

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“If a contract contains a clause that might cause you to fail in your obligations, cite the CMTO and insist that it is changed or removed before signing.”



an extra value. Extras might include laundry, security, supplies, reception staff, a website presence, business cards, a parking space or a music system. The list can be extensive. When looking at two different business site options, be sure you are comparing like for like.

A big extra can be a receptionist who is paid \$50,000 a year and shared between two people. This salary can mean an additional \$2083 per month value to the rent split, assuming the receptionist is providing 50% of their time to the practitioner. Even taking just 10% of the receptionist's time would mean a value of \$417 per month.

The short of this? Know what you are paying for, and its quality and value.

What taxes do I need to pay?

What does a new or seasoned RMT need to know about HST, GST, PST or income tax? The best answer is to find an accountant or mentor who understands the RMT profession. This is one area (among many!) that cannot be overlooked. The RMTAO offers guidance on HST and how HST applies to split-percent-age scenarios.³ This is a good starting point and covers the basics.

How do I ensure I meet my CMTO obligations?

The CMTO, through the *Massage Therapy Act*, RHPA, PHIPA and so many other Acts,

has created strict standards, policies and guidelines that outline the necessary tasks and responsibilities that an RMT must undertake when in practice.

These cannot be circumvented by anyone—not by a spa or clinic owner, lawyer, adjuster, case adjudicator, insurance company or other health professional. As RMTs, we are obligated to follow the CMTO. No one can ask for us to remove any obligation from our practice, for any reason (other than a judge or in response to a change in the CMTO standards, policies and guidelines). Therefore, when entering into a business relationship, you must be certain not to allow this to occur. If a contract contains a clause that might cause you to fail in your obligations, cite the CMTO and insist that it is changed or removed before signing.

Plan for the future

The end of your career can sneak up very quickly and, as the saying goes, the best time to plan for the end of your career is at the start of it. The second-best time is today. ■

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