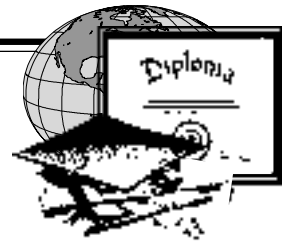

Getting Started: What They Didn't Teach You In Graduate School

Part II: That First Job



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Many recent graduates use their year of post-doctoral supervised experience as a stepping stone to their first full-time position as a psychologist. After a year of work under the supervision of a psychologist, your skills and value to them are well known. Sometimes, however, the new psychologist discovers interests outside what the supervision setting has to offer or a permanent position is not offered.

Full-time salaried positions are another frequent first choice for recently licensed psychologists. These settings provide the security of a guaranteed salary along with important benefits such as health, disability, and life insurance as well as paid leave time. They also often provide a structured work environment with opportunities for supervision, case consultation, peer interaction, and administrative support. Typically, you won't have to worry about managed care and insurance reimbursement, and will be able to focus on patient care. This is often a good way to begin in clinical practice. Many who choose this route then begin an independent practice during free time on evenings and weekends, and ultimately cut back to part time or leave the salaried position altogether.

A related option is to obtain a part-time salaried position for the benefits mentioned above, and then use the remaining time for independent practice. You can establish your own practice or join an already established

group. Some psychologists focus their full time efforts on establishing their own practices or join a group practice on a full time basis.

There are several important issues to consider before selecting any of these options. There is also no one, correct answer that fits the needs of all new psychologists.

First, consider your professional goals and personal needs - both for your career aspirations and your personal life. Those starting or already supporting a family, coordinating work schedules with a partner, paying off loans, interested in a specific population, or seeking to develop a specific area of specialization will need to consider these and related issues when making career plans. The opportunity for interaction and consultation with colleagues, supervision, ongoing training, and administrative support all make a salaried position or work in an established group practice desirable for beginning practitioners.

Hershey (1991) reports that most independent practitioners worked for 5 – 10 years in another setting before setting out on their own. Acquiring skills, learning the business of practice, and developing a professional reputation in a local area grow during that time. Working in another, organized setting also provides the financial stability and support typically needed as a practice is slowly developed.

Work in a group practice setting offers the many benefits described

above along with the ability to share office expenses, marketing and advertising costs, and other overhead expenses. Typically, one works as an independent contractor, paying self-employment taxes, setting your own hours, and hopefully over time, developing your own referral sources. A contractual agreement may stipulate that you receive a certain percentage of the fees collected and the practice keeps the rest to pay for the various expenses of running the practice and some profit for the partners who will initially feed you referrals.

Authors such as Sternberg (1997) describe group practices as better suited for work within the managed care framework. A group allows the practitioners to provide a wide range of services in one setting and can better afford the support staff often needed to address administrative requirements associated with work within managed care.

For those who want to create, develop, and run their own practice, becoming an independent practitioner is a great choice. While patience and hard work are needed to establish and maintain an independent practice, the rewards can be substantial. Only your own efforts and abilities limit earnings potential. Successful practitioners provide high quality services, often develop a specialty or niche(s) based on personal interests and local needs and conduct active and ongoing marketing activities. However, along with the independence and success come added responsibilities such as

leasing an office, hiring and managing a staff, acquiring contracts, billing, insurance, and related aspects of running a business.

For all private practitioners, active involvement in one's professional association often leads to many referrals as well. Readers are referred to the MPA website at www.marylandpsychology.org for the many job postings, practice opportunities, and classified ads regularly listed. **Ψ**