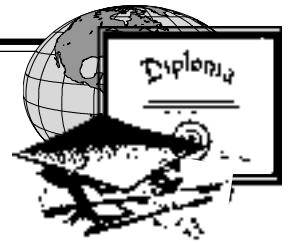


Getting Started: What They Didn't Teach You In Graduate School

Part III: Marketing Your Practice



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After the extensive academic and clinical training psychologists receive in graduate school it would be nice to think one could just open a practice and be as busy as desired evaluating and treating patients. Unfortunately, the “open it and they will come” approach to building a practice tends not to be very effective. An active marketing plan is crucial to each psychologist’s success in developing and maintaining a successful practice. While the idea may seem daunting initially, numerous resources exist and some rather simple and straightforward strategies may yield great results.

Psychologists who are already established in private practice can be invaluable resources, and the benefit of networking with colleagues in order to gain advice or referrals should not be underestimated. In order to establish and maintain an independent practice, it is essential to build a strong referral base, participate in professional organizations, utilize current marketing techniques, and become actively involved in your community.

Meet with successful and experienced psychologists in your local area. Learn what has worked and not worked for them. Tell them about your training, experience, and expertise, and seek suggestions for success in practice. Establish a mentoring relationship with one or more of these successful professionals. In addition to all the valuable guidance you’re likely to receive, if they have busy practices and you’ve presented yourself well, you may receive referrals of patients from them.

Consider issues or populations not typically served by all psychologists. Identify periods of transition that are experienced throughout the lifespan, such as infertility, adjusting to parenthood, coping with special needs children, adapting to retirement or loss of a family member (Kovacs, 2001). Develop skills in areas such as divorce mediation, personal or executive coaching, consultation, and other non-traditional areas. Contact individuals who work with your target population outside the field of psychology such as adoption attorneys, judges, school psychologists, and geriatric physicians. Develop presentations or workshops that can be delivered to the public or professionals in the related field. Develop expertise in treating populations or difficulties that are under served in your community.

Contact and meet with other professionals who may be potential referral sources. Find out what types of patients they treat and how well they feel their needs are being met. Follow-up all meetings with a letter and be sure to highlight how you can help meet the specific needs described. Enclose business cards and practice brochures. Offer to provide a workshop at their site on a topic of relevance to the population they serve.

Follow-up all direct referrals with a letter acknowledging the referral and thanking the referral source (with appropriate consent). If appropriate, such as with physicians referring their patients to you for treatment or evaluation, send a report or treatment plan and progress updates. Remember your audience who need brief, readable, and useful

communications. Also, a successfully treated patient who is pleased with you and the result of treatment is a valuable marketing resource as well. Send a follow-up letter a month or so after treatment ends. Include a few business cards and practice brochures. Encourage them to call you again if your services are needed in the future.

Present free workshops to make your expertise and services known without directly marketing your practice. Presentations should primarily focus on real life issues and practical suggestions rather than theory or research. Provide educational hand-outs with your contact information, allowing the audience to reach you, as well as practice brochures and newsletters if you have them. This strategy increases community awareness and also establishes you as a knowledgeable resource with your target population.

Become active in the community and participate in philanthropic, civic, religious, advocacy, cultural, or educational organizations. Involvement in local, state, and national psychological associations and participation on boards or committees serve a variety of purposes, including networking with colleagues and obtaining marketing advice from those established in the field.

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variety of purposes, including networking with colleagues, obtaining marketing advice from those established in the field, and developing opportunities to conduct continuing education workshops. Involvement in local, state, and national psychological associations and participating on boards or committees serves a variety of purposes, including networking with colleagues, obtaining marketing advice from those established in the field, and developing opportunities to conduct continuing education workshops. Establishing your expertise in the public arena can be accomplished by writing a column for your community newspaper, developing adult education courses in high schools and community colleges, and volunteering with a trauma response team.

Create a website to ensure you are marketing your practice to all those searching for mental health information online. Millions of Americans now seek health care information through the Internet (Fingeld, 2000; Kiel, 2001). Be sure to provide information that will assist them in choosing you for treatment. Make your website a valuable resource for mental health information with links to other useful sites. Examples of some excellent websites that may provide you with ideas for developing or modifying your own are:

www.mindspring.com/~docld/

www.drelainerodino.com

www.drhaber.com

Marketing your practice is a continuous process that will initially require patience and hard work. As your practice expands, nurture referral sources by expressing

appreciation for their efforts. Never assume that the referrals will just keep coming on their own.

Marketing Tips for Practitioners:

- Get actively involved in the community and your profession. Network, use colleagues as resources, and establish mentoring relationships.
- Utilize readily available resources. Read available books such as:

“Saying Good-Bye to Managed Care: Building Your Independent Psychotherapy Practice” by Sandra Haber, Ph.D., Elaine Rodino, Ph.D., Iris Lipner, CSW., Springer Publishing Company, www.springerpub.com. Toll Free: 1-877-687-7476.

“How to Build a Thriving Fee-for-Service Practice” by Laurie Kolt, Ph.D., Academic Press, www.apnet.com.

“Strategic Marketing: How to Achieve Independence and Prosperity in Your Mental Health Practice” by Kalman Heller, Ph.D., Professional Resource Press, orders@prpress.com. 1-800-443-3364.

- Create niches and specialties based on your community’s needs. Consider innovative and non-traditional applications of your training and skills.
- Develop a marketing plan based on the needs of your local area and likely referral sources. Evaluate its effectiveness periodically, and adjust your efforts as needed.
- Never forget that you’re in business. Effective marketing is part of every business’ success.

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