Create Community and Grow Your Practice

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Many healthcare providers are fortunate to enjoy the freedom and independence of owning their own businesses. However, the constant demands can lead to a lonely and isolating experience unless you make an effort to get out of your office. Let's discuss a few different ways you can create your own supportive community of like-minded practitioners which, in turn, can help build your practice.

One-On-One

A personal meeting with other practitioners is a fantastic way to learn more about them and their practices. Make a list of providers you'd like to get to know better. Invite one or two people a month to meet with you. (For a more relaxed atmosphere, consider coffee or lunch. You can either go "Dutch," or you can pick up the tab. It's a small price to pay for the potential exposure.) If you have the first meeting on neutral ground, subsequent meetings can be held at each of your practices for "show-and-tell."

Make sure you are asking questions! Show genuine interest in them and their profession by asking questions and paying attention to the answers. (Take notes if you need to.) Some questions to get you started are:

- What inspired you to choose your career?
- How long have you been in practice?
- How, specifically, do you help clients? (i.e.: special techniques, self care, etc.)
- What kinds of clients or conditions do you excel at taking care of?
- What kinds of clients or conditions do you refer out?
- What is your preferred referral process?
- What makes you feel comfortable referring your clients to another provider?

Listen and ask follow-up questions depending on their responses. Also, be prepared to answer any of their questions next. Follow-up with a brief note of thanks or appreciation for the time they spent with you.

Mastermind Group

One of the most well-known types of networking groups, a mastermind commonly includes 4 to 10 members. The members can belong to one profession or several. Meetings are held bi-weekly or monthly, and last 2 to 3 hours. The format is extremely flexible, and the meetings can be constructed to meet the needs and personalities of those involved. You will need to figure out where and when the first meeting be held. Will refreshments be provided? Who'll take minutes?

Make a list of peers you respect and trust – those with whom you'd be comfortable brainstorming and invite them to join your mastermind group. (Be clear on their commitment of time and resources.) At

the first meeting, allow 15 to 30 minutes of social time, then:

- Have each person briefly introduce themselves and share a recent win/success. This sets a positive tone and helps establish rapport. (It can be eliminated in future meetings if participants just want to get to work.)
- Have each person share a challenge they're facing. The group can brainstorm and offer suggestions for resolution.
- Have each person share another win, as this ends the meeting on a high note.

Determine the frequency, location(s), dates, time, etc. of subsequent meetings. Establish a way for the group to communicate with each other between meetings (phone and e-mail list, Facebook group, etc.).

Practitioner's Circle

The PC is similar to a mastermind group in many ways. However, where the mastermind is a small group often focusing on members of one profession, the PC excels in bringing practitioners of various disciplines together. Additionally, it's a great way to learn more about healing professions other than your own, which can benefit you and your clients. First, decide where and when the first meeting be held. Will refreshments be provided? Who'll take minutes? Make a list of various healthcare providers. Some ideas to get you started: Acupuncturists, Ayurvedic practitioners, chiropractors, dentists, energy workers, other massage therapists, mental health workers, physical therapists, veterinarians, etc. If you're not sure what resources are in your local area, look in the yellow pages, local magazines, or online. There's no real limit on the number of participants – whatever you're comfortable with or works for your space.

Call or e-mail to invite them to attend a PC. (Be clear on their commitment of time and resources.) Remind them to bring plenty of business cards. At the first meeting, allow 15 to 30 minutes of social time, then:

Have each person introduce themselves, their practice, and their discipline. (The length of time allotted will depend on how many people are present. You may wish to limit it to 1 minute per person, 5 minutes, or whatever works for your group.)

Have each person share a challenge they're facing. The group can brainstorm and offer suggestions for resolution. Alternatively, you can focus the group's time on those with the greatest need. Simply ask who has an issue they'd like the group to help with. It can be something as simple as opinions on a new business card or brochure, all the way up to ideas to break through a client's plateau. (HIPPA compliant, of course.)

Determine the frequency, location(s), dates, time, etc. of subsequent meetings. Establish a way for the group to communicate with each other between meetings (phone and e-mail list, Facebook group, etc.).

If you find yourself in your office and isolated, make a change! Look for ways to become involved with your local healthcare community. If your options are limited, take the initiative and create a forum for healthcare professionals to come together to support and encourage each other. Remember, the above options work best when individual participants are respectful and truly committed to helping each other succeed. If you find that's not the case, you may consider adding a screening or referral process.

Use these ideas as a starting point and modify them to fit your needs, personality, profession, and region. They can be powerful tools to provide support, promote intellectual and financial growth, and enhance the well-being of your patients. Get out of your office and get connecting!

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