

Know your business: Ethical treatment planning - to re-book or not to re-book

The issue of re-booking future appointments for clients and giving advice about treatment plans is a challenge for many massage therapists. Aran Bright looks at ethical treatment planning.

Massage therapists genuinely care about their clients and they want to do the right thing at all times - and this extends to looking out for clients' financial interests as well. How many times have you given a discount for clients because you didn't want them to be out of pocket?

This extremely caring attitude can get in the way when a client asks, 'When should I re-book?' Suddenly the therapist is in a quandary. How can a therapist make a decision that will affect the client's wallet, while still giving honest, ethical advice about his or her healthcare? What the client needs and what is in their budget can sometimes be two different things.

The solution is to simply leave the economic quandary out of the equation and make recommendations that are based on the best healthcare decisions for your client. It probably won't surprise you to learn that clients don't need financial advice from a massage therapist. What they require is advice on when they should return to get the best results from their ongoing treatment.

Focus on high quality service and high quality healthcare: it's as simple as that.

How can I be sure I am giving the right advice to clients about when to return for the next treatment?

There are two key factors to giving good advice about re-booking.

1. Understanding clients' goals for receiving massage treatments and any injuries that they may have.
2. Being realistic about the effects of your treatment.

To understand your clients' goals there is one thing you really need to do, listen! Even if you feel you are sure about their initial goal, regularly check and confirm that you and the

client are in agreement. Goals change depending on how treatment progresses, so you need to keep checking in with your client.

Being realistic, ask yourself how long the effects of the treatment will last? Let's be honest with ourselves, one treatment is probably equivalent to one very focused and precise stretching session for a client. If we are to compare remedial massage treatment with stretching or foam rolling (self-myofascial release) then we will regularly see stretching or foam rolling performed three times a week to achieve clinically relevant results (Mohr, 2014).

Acute or chronic?

It is usually not possible to see your client three times a week, however, if you want to achieve an increase in range of motion to help relieve pain and improve function while a client is dealing with an acute injury, once a week is reasonable. It is normal to see a significant improvement in function in two to three weeks. If clients are also spending another two sessions per week performing their stretching or exercises at home, the results are generally improved.

To assist clients recovering from an acute injury, massage facilitates a return to function and can reduce the likelihood of an acute injury becoming chronic.

What if my client has chronic pain and is getting treatment from other healthcare practitioners?

For clients dealing with chronic pain, massage treatment should be recommended on an ongoing basis. We now know that chronic pain is best managed from a holistic perspective, addressing biological, psychological and social dimensions of the individual. For this reason it is generally best to recommend to clients that they get consultations with GPs, physios, psychologists, nutritionists, naturopaths or anyone else that they feel they need assistance

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THE 'QUALITY' OF CARE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE QUANTITY OF CARE.



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from to achieve the results they want. Taking on all aspects of a client's healthcare is unrealistic for one practitioner, so discuss with your clients how massage can be integrated into their total healthcare plan.

For chronic pain management, consider visits that are timed further apart than acute injuries, but more regular in nature. Monthly or fortnightly massages can work really well for many reasons, especially if the therapist is actively giving advice about stretches or exercises a client can do to improve their levels of physical function and activity. Remember, feedback, education, motivation as well as physical treatment are all equally important to support clients through the management of an injury or health condition. Good service as a massage therapist, should always be about good healthcare advice for the client.

Never underestimate the effect good service has on client outcomes

The more research looks at outcomes from healthcare services especially in the areas of soft tissue injuries and pain management, the more apparent it is that the 'quality' of care is more important than the quantity of care. Healing occurs in the human body, as a result of the client's own biological systems. We now know that 'whole of person' factors have a more significant role in recovery from pain and

injury than biomechanical factors on their own. The perspective that clients have on their injuries may, in many cases, have more of an effect on positive outcomes than the treatment they receive.

Making clients feel empowered and in control of their body and their health leads to less incidences of acute pain developing into chronic pain, as well as seeing improvements in long-term chronic pain, where mechanical therapy alone has not achieved effective results (Vibe Fersum, 2012). What this means for the massage therapist is that if they can focus on positive outcomes in the treatment planning process, then there is an increased chance that they will achieve results.

In summary, a massage therapist who regularly listens to their clients, works to achieve their goals and provides a positive yet realistic treatment plan, is a therapist who is very likely to have a successful and ethical practice.

References

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- Vibe Fersum, et.al 2012. Efficacy of classification-based cognitive functional therapy in patients with chronic low back pain: A randomised controlled trial. *European Journal of Pain*. Vol 17 No 6 pp 916-928.