



# American Mental Health Counselors Association

## White Paper Series

### 9 Ways to Build Your Practice

- 1. Work into it slowly.** If you are just starting a practice, it is often wise to start part time while you have a steady income. Often, if you work for a school or an agency, you can start building a name for yourself in the community before you launch into a full-time practice. Remember to follow the ethics of separating your clients from your place of work.
- 2. Use word of mouth.** The best advertising and the cheapest is word of mouth. Business cards are inexpensive and making it a habit to pass them out to everyone you know is good marketing. Be creative; often there are information boards at different businesses where you can post your card. Join business support groups and pass your cards out at meetings.
- 3. Join your national organization and state chapter of AMHCA.** There are tools and links to help you set up and market your business. Psychology Today offers a listing in the Therapy Directory, in which you can develop a profile of yourself and market your practice. Being a member of your national and state organization also gives you opportunities to get CEUs and to network with therapists all over the world.
- 4. Have a niche; become an expert in your field.** Let's face it: the competition for clients is getting more and more challenging. Often, if you are known as an expert in a specific type of therapy, you have a better chance of getting referrals for that specialty. Getting your name on the list at your local TV stations and newspapers can get you an interview that can help you be recognized as an expert in your field. The absolute best advertising, on which you cannot put a price, is being interviewed as an expert. Not only is it free, you cannot pay to get that kind of recognition.
- 5. Give free lectures or informational talks to groups.** PTAs, mental health organizations, and businesses all are great places for you to give lectures and to get your name out into the community. Meeting people and having them see you in action is time well spent. You will often get referrals from one of your presentations. Also sending out, via email, a newsletter or mental health awareness information on a topic familiar to you can create referrals.
- 6. Consider hiring a billing service that charges a percentage for the amount they collect rather than a flat rate.** This way you only get charged for what they collect, not for what they bill. This is a natural motivator for them to work hard to bill and collect your money. Also, you do not have to pay Worker's Compensation or health insurance for a full time

employee. You can purchase computer programs to do your own billing, which is fine if you have the time, but your time is worth a lot more than what you will pay a billing company.

- 7. Use care when you consider joining an existing practice that takes a percentage of your income.** For example, let's say they take 50% of what you bill. Make sure you know the fine print and what they offer you in return. It is much cleaner to have your own practice, or share office space and expenses while you take care of your own billing, client referrals, and appointments. You also have to be aware of the legal and ethical concerns of joining a practice.
- 8. Develop a peer study group that can meet every month or so to go over cases and to support each other in your private practice.** A private practice in psychotherapy is a very lonely business. We really need to connect with other practicing therapists, both new and seasoned, to keep our sanity and to keep in balance.
- 9. Speaking of balance, take care of yourself!** Do not overextend yourself! I believe clients will take as much of your time as you allow them to take. You could be working Saturdays and late evenings if you allow it. When starting a practice, you may have to work extra hard; however, a burned-out therapist is not good for their clients or anyone else. Practice what you preach—work out on a regular basis and spend time with family and friends. Remember, the word recreate is actually RECreate!

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The American Mental Health Counselors Association is a growing community of more than 7,000 clinical mental health counselors. Together, we make a critical impact on the lives of American. AMHCA succeeds in giving a voice to our profession nationwide and in helping serve you and your colleagues in your state.