



# Tools to Succeed for Massage Therapist to Build Your Practice

By David Kent, LMT, NCTMB

Keeping It Simple Series

In these tough economic times, how can you stand out above the competition so that clients will continue to spend their time and money on treatments with you? Well, it often depends on your ability to determine the root of your clients' complaints coupled with the effectiveness of your treatment and your ability to educate your clients about the muscular components of their pain.

This article will review effective, time-proven methods that work together to educate and empower your clients so that they'll not only want to continue their treatments, but also play an active role in their own healing process. All massage modalities can be integrated with the tools discussed in this article in any type of setting, including spa, clinical or outcall practices.

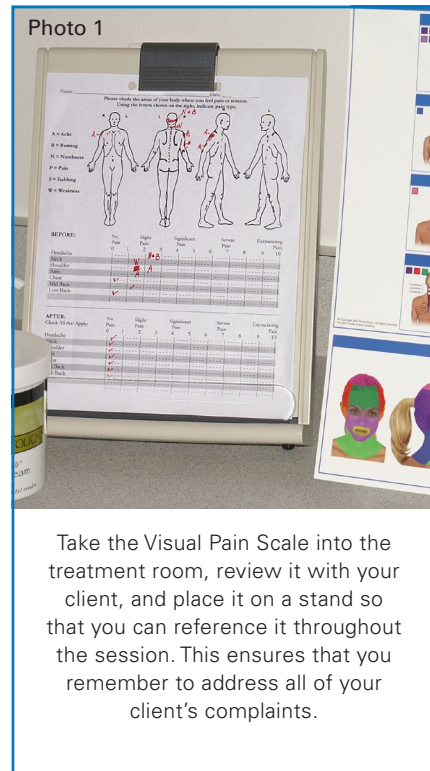
Education is a necessary component of a client's overall treatment plan. Although one treatment may be helpful, perhaps a series of four, six or more would provide greater benefit. But in order to communicate this to your clients and help them recognize why committing to follow-up treatments makes sense, it is necessary for them to understand the processes of their body.

## Using Forms

A client's initial visit should always include a detailed intake form that provides an overview of his/her current and past health conditions. Often this paperwork reveals clues by listing prior accidents, injuries, surgeries and chronic conditions. Additionally, maintaining written accounts of a client's health history helps protect you in the unlikely and rare event of a client lawsuit. Professional liability insurance covers you as a therapist in case you are ever sued. Remember to always seek authorization from the client's medical doctor if you are unsure about potential contraindications.

Visual Pain Scales allow clients to specify and document regions of discomfort, the type and intensity of the pain, and other complaints. I suggest you take the Visual Pain Scale into the treatment room, review it with your client, and place it on a stand so that you can reference it

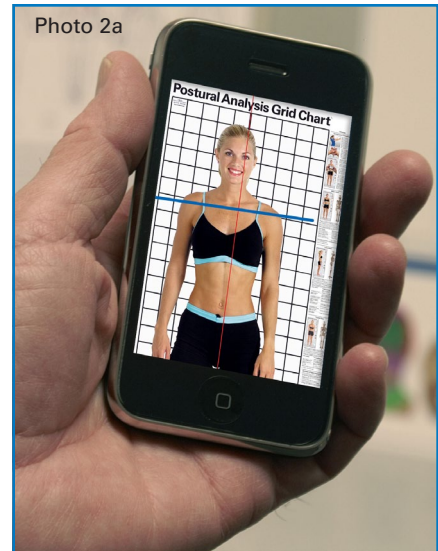
throughout the session. This also helps ensure that you remember to address all of your client's complaints, which a key factor in retaining a steady flow of returning clientele. Without the aid of documentation, it can be easy to slip into a massage routine and forget to address the very reason the client sought treatment in the first place (Photo 1).



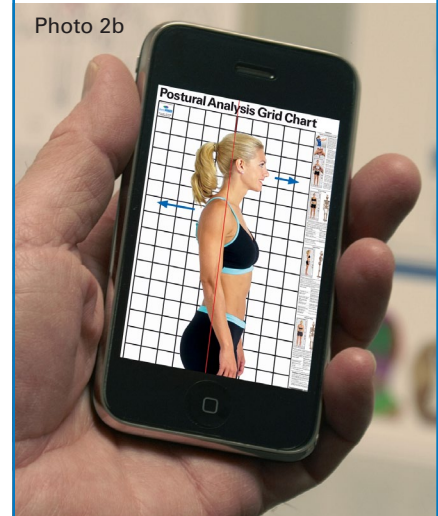
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## Taking Pictures

It is said, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Postural analysis photos only take a moment to snap, but they can go a long way in helping you explain the stresses on various muscles and to show which muscles are shortened and over lengthened. Keep it simple, the camera and screen built into a cell phone would even allow you to show client's their forward head or high shoulder posture. Remember to always get permission to take postural analysis photos and treat them confidentially—as you would any other medical records (Photo 2a,b).

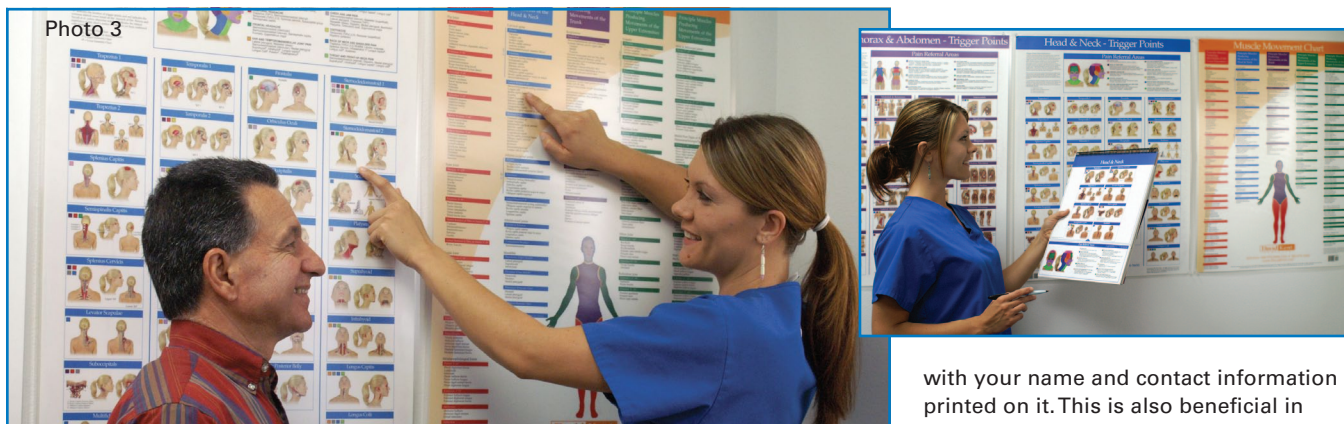


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## Relying on Charts

Charts can help you explain to clients the function of muscles and demonstrate why some are stressed and painful. Portable flip charts provide a professional



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presentation in any environment and are easily moved from one location and/or treatment room to another. The best flip charts on the market are easy to use with logical formats and laminated pages to prevent oils and lotions from damaging them over time. (Photo 3)

Wall charts are also useful and easy to reference. If you are limited on wall space, you can invest in an inexpensive wall chart hanger system that allows you to hang and access up to 10 wall charts in a single space. Muscular and skeletal charts are useful in showing the symmetry that exists in the body. And a Postural Analysis Grid chart makes it easy—even for the layperson—to see the body's asymmetries in postural photos. And a muscle movement chart also gives the degrees of normal range-of-motion for each joint, which aids with the assessment and development of a treatment and self-care routine.

Trigger point charts, depending on their design, can assist in developing a comprehensive treatment plan that is both based on medical research and specific to your client's pain. (Photo 4). If trigger points are identified during the treatment session, a trigger point flip chart can also help you show clients their trigger point patterns while they are still on the treatment table. The formation of trigger points is often the result and/or cause of postural distortions that can be identified in the postural analysis photos, as well.

### Using and Selling Topical Analgesics

Topical analgesics can help generate additional income without spending extra hours in the treatment room. Many clients use topical analgesics between treatments. There are several types on the market. One company offers free samples attached to a flyer

with your name and contact information printed on it. This is also beneficial in promoting your business. Integrate the use of topical analgesics into your treatment routine and give your clients a few sample packs to use at home. Free samples often lead to future sales. If your clients want to buy a topical analgesic, it's better for you to make a few extra dollars selling it than sending them to the drugstore down the street.

### Review

At the end of each treatment, take a minute to review your findings with the client. Use their pain scale, posture photos, skeletal, muscular and trigger point charts to create a treatment plan. This would also be an excellent time to offer your client a package of treatments that has a financial incentive for them to commit.

Remember, people will spend money on care they feel will make the difference in the quality of their lives. You just need to give them the knowledge and the reasons to make an educated decision. Using the tools and systems outlined in this article will enable you to revolutionize and protect your practice in these tough times.

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