



Questions with Direction

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Keeping It Simple Series

One of the most challenging aspects of being a massage therapist is trying to build a thriving practice with repeat clients. So, it's no surprise that many therapists have felt the crunch with the recent downturn in the economy. And, unfortunately, services like massage therapy are often among the first things to be cut from one's budget in times of economic crisis.

Therefore, it is now more important than ever to convince your clients to stay the course with their massage therapy sessions. This article will show you how asking some simple questions can ultimately lead to repeat clients, whether you work in a spa, outcall, seated- or clinical-massage setting. Soliciting a client's feedback by way of asking thorough questions will better help you understand you client's needs and deliver results. But even more important than asking the question, is listening and responding to the information your client provides.

One way to organize your questions is to make use of the wide-range of forms available for these purposes. In fact, your questions will, to a degree, be directed by the information you obtain using forms. I have my clients complete intake forms prior to therapy; these help me develop targeted questions to clarify my knowledge about their health history, their specific areas of pain, the stresses in their life, the ergonomics of their activities of daily living (ADLs), medications they are taking, and to identify any precautions or contraindications before the session begins. Using intake forms helps me develop goals for the client's current and future sessions—which is also useful in persuading my clients to commit to ongoing treatment.

There are various types of questions; however, this article will focus on two primary categories: general and those related to a client's pain. General questions are great for helping you understand your client's expectations, no matter what kind of practice you have.



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GENERAL QUESTIONS:

Question: What are your goals for today's session?

Reasoning: If you don't ask this question, you won't know if a client wants a relaxing Swedish massage or a vigorous sports massage that integrates stretching. This is also important so that you are responding to your client's needs and not responding to your *perception* of your client's needs.

Question: What areas you would like me to focus on today?

Reasoning: This question also relates to the question above. At one time or another, we've all probably had an experience with a therapist that seemingly ignored the very thing that brought us to therapy in the first place. When you ask this question, it is very important to listen closely to the answer. When you listen to the client and deliver results, it increases the odds that your client will reschedule and/or refer others.

Question: Have you received massage therapy before?

Reasoning: Regardless of the client's answer, this is the ideal time to communicate to the client how you will perform the session. For new clients,

you might advise the client to disrobe to his/her level of comfort and then discuss draping techniques. For veteran clients, you might ask if they'd like you to do something extra special, such as incorporate essential oils into the session.

Question: If you have received massage therapy previously, please tell me where you received it, by whom, and which treatments were the most beneficial?

Reasoning: This information can help you understand how to adapt the session to the types of massage therapy that have produced positive responses for the client in the past. You might also ask the client what he/she thinks makes a great massage—and then do what you can to meet the client's expectation.

Question: What type of pressure do you prefer?

Reasoning: Keep in mind that levels of pressure are subjective for each client; what you perceive as light pressure and what the client perceives as light pressure could be entirely different. It is important that you check in with the client at the start of and during the session.

Question: Have you ever had any negative effects and/or experiences from receiving massage in the past?

Reasoning: People respond to massage in different ways. Some people get ill



or are sore for several days after they receive a deep massage. This is where intake forms and questions can be very useful. Some questions might include what medications the client is on, if he/she bruises easily, what the client's diet is like, as well as questions related to general health and exercise.



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Question: Is there anything else that I should know?

Reasoning: I intentionally keep this question open-ended so that the client can add additional information at their discretion. It is up to me to connect the dots. I am frequently amazed by how many clients will tell me about a traumatic accident and/or major surgery in the past that they didn't mention previously.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PAIN:

Question: What other healthcare providers have you seen recently and for what?

Reasoning: This question immediately informs you if your client has seen a doctor or if the client has self-diagnosed.

I can then quickly perform a postural analysis (See my article, "Getting Comfortable with Postural Analysis" in the July issue of MT), check range of motion, and perform relevant muscle tests and orthopedic assessments to determine if it is appropriate to proceed or if the client needs to first follow up with a physician.

Question: Have you tried different healthcare practitioners over time? If so, which one(s) provided the most relief? What did they do and how long did the results last?

Reasoning: Understanding more about the treatments a client has sought for pain relief will give you insight into how you can best help him/her. For example, if the client sees a chiropractor on a regular basis, you

might suggest that he/she schedule an appointment with you immediately before the appointment with a chiropractor for maximum results.

Question: What do you do for pain relief?

Reasoning: I am always surprised by how many people buy topical pain relievers at a drug store. Why should the drug store get the money? Consider selling topical ointments in your practice. Integrate a topical into the therapy

session and then send the client home with a sample. The next time the client buys a topical ointment, it might just be from you.

Question: What aggravates your condition?

Reasoning: If the client reports increased back pain when standing or straightening after bending down, it might indicate lumbar and hip flexor or extensor involvement. A muscle-movement chart can help you determine exactly which muscles to assess. Trigger point charts are useful for educating clients about referred pain. Additionally, using the postural analysis information combined with photos helps show the client how stressed or shortened muscles have contributed to the formation of trigger points. This further leads into a discussion of how a series of treatments can be beneficial.

Asking the right questions can help your practice tremendously. I am looking forward to learning how the questions in this article worked for you. I encourage you to read my other articles that can help during these challenging economic times.

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