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Expanding Your Practice

Use naturopathic principles in your practice and thrive!

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Do you have systems in place to keep you on track and follow up with patients, manage your inventory, or tell you how much money you have made each day?

How often do you contemplate, pray or meditate about your business challenges? What insight have you gathered in this process? Could a business issue really be a spiritual issue?

Many naturopathic physicians think running the business of their practice is against all that is naturopathic; unholistic, unworthy of their efforts, draining energy from the therapeutic healing efforts of being a good doctor. After all, the business is just something that must be put up with, dealt with in order to treat patients. I propose an alternate way to view your practice. I invite you to view it instead as the temple of the principles of naturopathic medicine infused in every part of your practice; not only therapeutically, but also throughout the business, in your communications and how your practice interacts with its community. What you say? Impossible! Read below and see how naturopathic principles are being applied in the practice of the business.

Good business management has been using naturopathic principles for years! When the six principles of naturopathic medicine are consistently applied to the naturopathic medical practice, the naturopathic physician is assured of the success he or she desires.

1. Prevention is the Best Cure

Practicing good management and marketing requires diligent discipline to a set group of activities and planning. This discipline prevents your practice's failure and makes your business immune to whatever challenges it might face. Does your practice have internal controls that tell what your practice's financial blood pressure, cholesterol and lipid levels are? Do you have systems in place to keep you on track and follow up with patients, manage your inventory, or tell you how much money you have made each day? How is your practice's "GI" system? You know, its general information system (GI). Having these systems in place allows your practice to be balanced and on track according to your goals. Maintaining these systems is the prevention of imbalance and ultimate failure.



2. First Do No Harm

Care in treating the patient includes proper legal requirements, quality control procedures, as well as proper follow-up. How much care have you taken not to harm anyone in the community, your creditors, your family, or your employees? What is the language of your practice? Is it respectful, with good strong boundaries with patients, employees, creditors, family, and even yourself? Are you doing harm to yourself by working too hard or being too preoccupied with your practice or patients? Or are you filled with fear and anger because things are not going your way and you are sitting in your office in blaming paralysis because patients are not coming and staying with you? How much purposeful thought have you given to this aspect of the philosophy of your life and your practice?

3. Treat the Whole Person

When your practice is viewed as an organism, as a person if you will, separate from the owner, this principle embodies the global view of the business. Are all practice elements functioning in synchronization and focused on one goal? Are people, computers, management, reports, accounting functions, administration, marketing, all in sync with each other? How does this business react to its environment? How do you interact not only with your patients but with the outside world? What is out of balance? What needs adjusting? Is it your attitude? Do you need more time for yourself and family? Do you need to reach out to the healthcare community at large? As we mentioned earlier, what are the “vital signs” of your practice? Do you review them daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually? Do you have a treatment plan or regime designed to get your practice on track? Discover your inherent weaknesses and shore them up with outside “supplemental” consulting help. Then take the supplement and willingly listen to the advice you are given. Have you thought of yourself as a compliant patient when it comes to the advice of your practice? Are you looking for that “magic pill” to get you out of the practice management stress you are in?

4. Treat the Cause

Once the source of imbalance is identified then strategies to fix the situation are discussed with experts in the specific field. What is your treatment plan to get your practice on track? What is the root cause of your practice management issue? Perhaps looking in the mirror might be a start. What are you doing to improve your skills to own and operate your practice? Do you consider business courses as part of your Continuing Education? Is there anything you can personally change first that might improve your practice? Are there bridges that need to be built? Circumstances that need to change? Can you really change them? Do you have enough time to change them? How will you be there for your patients if you cannot keep your doors open? Do you need help or “supplemental” expertise? I suggest you get help even if you think you cannot afford it. Most turn-arounds occur when the owner begins to think differently, sees some emerging results and has a renewed sense of hope. Remember to think of your practice as a patient with an imbalance. How would you motivate that patient to stay on the treatment plan?

5. Physician as Teacher

Physician as teacher is the essence of your patient interactions and the basis of marketing your practice. Communicating valuable naturopathic medical information to others by word, act, deed and demeanor is imperative to creating a successful practice. Everywhere you go you represent the profession, yourself and the medicine; the grocery store, church,



temple, synagogue, community service committees, neighborhood activities, family events, extracurricular activities. These are the precious moments the universe gives each of you to be “Physician as Teacher”. You are known as a “doctor” and others will seek out your advice. You have an advanced standing in the community just by the nature of your title. Take this mantle of leadership and shine with the principles. Do you walk your talk? Do you look the part? Does your lifestyle reflect these principles? Are you the embodiment of these principles?

6. The Healing Power of Nature

This entails the spiritual side of business management. Unbeknownst to most people, the most successful (by that I mean prosperous and balanced) business owners have a very strong and daily spiritual program of some type. This is a not oft discussed principle in business, but scratch the surface of any true business leader and you will find an intensely spiritual person. The human being and all that it entails is the natural force of business. Principles of business have been around since humanity has been interacting with one another and there has been scarcity in the environment. Ancient cultures had established business codes and entwined them with their spiritual values and practice of the times. The same is true today. How often do you contemplate, pray or meditate about your business challenges? What insight have you gathered in this process? Could a business issue really be a spiritual issue?

As you reflect upon these six principles of naturopathic medicine, perhaps you can come up with your own interpretation of one or more of these principles. If you do, please share them with me. I would love to hear from you. You can contact me at j.hagan@scnm.edu at the Career Services Center at Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine. I wish you successful healing for all!

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Joanna M. Hagan, Director of Career Services at Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, has 29 years of healthcare marketing and finance-management experience. She comes from the insurance/HMO world and has assisted hundreds of physicians in building their practices by judicious use of marketing through networks. She also created her own coaching business in 1997. She created the first functional medical savings account program in the State of Arizona and is noted for creating the first group plan for the unemployed in the state. She is the current director of career services for the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and offers individualized coaching for success to any and all students and alumni. She has just recently been honored as “Faculty of the Year” for 2005 and for her work with the AANP and the profession.