

The Compassionate Practitioner

How to create a successful and rewarding practice.

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Introduction

The Compassionate Practitioner is a book written for independent, self-employed practitioners. It centres around the importance of a trusting relationship between practitioner and patient. This is a temporary relationship created solely for the work of helping the patient using a specific therapy or modality. The practitioner-patient relationship does not replace the therapy or become therapy in itself - but rather creates a strong foundation upon which the therapy can be practised. Without a trusting relationship there can be a lack of commitment on both sides leading to non-returning patients and a frustrated practitioner.

A really effective consultation is more than a series of questions and answers. A lot goes on non-verbally as the practitioner strives to understand the patient, and the patient in turn assesses whether they can trust the practitioner. What the patient is looking for is respect, compassion and understanding.

In *The Compassionate Practitioner* every stage of the consultation is examined carefully, considering both the practitioner's and patient's needs. There is a lot you can do to prepare in advance of the patient arriving. When they have arrived you can begin with making the patient feel comfortable and safe by creating a working agreement and clarifying the boundaries. Once these needs are satisfied, you can start the case-taking using the wide variety of skills and techniques explained here. Finally you can wind down the session, discuss your findings with the patient, and negotiate the way forwards.

It sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Yet in my research into different alternative therapies over the years, my experience has shown me first-hand how the relationship can be mishandled. There are few good role models around. Sadly, in orthodox medicine, the short consultation times and group practices make logistical and financial sense, but make creating a relationship with each patient increasingly difficult.

When a nourishing practitioner-patient relationship is set up, everyone benefits. The patient feels respected and understood and is more likely to return for further appointments, which exponentially increases their chance of healing. The practitioner gains in experience and confidence, and the whole practice begins to flourish and expand.

Two parallel themes run throughout the book, those of mindfulness and compassion. Mindfulness means bringing your awareness to the present moment and reducing other thoughts, such as the previous patient or the lunch to come. If you practice mindfulness it has several consequences. You will feel calmer and less stressed in your work, because you will have learnt to slow down the busy chatter of your thoughts. When you are mindful during the case taking you will focus more on the case and listen wholeheartedly. This allows you to see the case more clearly and understand what needs to be cured. The patient will appreciate both your calmness and your attentive awareness.

Compassion is about feeling the patient's pain or suffering and allowing this understanding to inform the treatment. It links the patient's story to the universal human experience taking away all prejudice or blame. Compassion can also be given to yourself, as you tell yourself to let go of the stranglehold of perfection, and be content as the good enough practitioner. Self-compassion is not the same as self-pity which has an element of helplessness. Instead self-compassion is coupled with learning, which keeps you on the road moving forward.

A third theme runs throughout *The Compassionate Practitioner*, and that is of self-reflection. This is the art of looking objectively at your work and examining it in order to learn from yourself. To keep self-reflection from becoming a record of self-criticism and self-defeat, you should look at both your strengths and your weaknesses. Then you can appreciate all of your successes, however small they are, as well as learn from your mistakes and failures. Self-reflection balances self-compassion and ensures growth in the practitioner, contributing to your Continuing Practitioner Development (CPD). Self-reflection can be done with a supervisor or by yourself using a journal dedicated to the purpose. At the end of each chapter in this book there is a journal example.

The Compassionate Practitioner was a book that demanded to be written, coming from my 20 years as a practitioner, teacher and supervisor as well as my research and my experience in the patient role. I wanted to write this book for all those alternative practitioners who have invested so much time and money into studying their therapy, yet have found building up their practice to be slow and unrewarding. I wanted to show how success is built up layer by layer, starting with the practitioner's attitude towards themselves, their patient and their practice.

Above all this is a practical book, full of advice and suggestions about how to create a flourishing practice without exhausting yourself or giving less to your patients. There is a chapter on self-care, suggesting many ways to relax in your time off and avoid burnout. Becoming a wholehearted practitioner is a work in progress, forever expanding, developing, and learning from your experience.

This book was written for alternative practitioners of all disciplines, but it will be of interest to anyone who is in the helping professions or studying to become so. It will be of value to complementary and alternative practitioners such as homeopaths, acupuncturists, shiatsu practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners, naturopaths, nutritional therapists, Reiki practitioners, body-workers and herbalists. It could also benefit art, music and drama therapists.

I have used the words 'practitioner' and 'therapist' to mean the person who provides the healing modality, and the word 'therapy' to describe their discipline. All of the cases are made up but inevitably they are influenced by my 20 years' experience as a practitioner and as a supervisor. The book can be either read through from start to finish or dipped into at random.

My hope is that by introducing more rigour into the way that they approach the practitioner-patient relationship, alternative practitioners can become more professional. This will make their patients feel safer and more respected and the practitioner will feel free to express their compassion. Everyone will gain, and the practice will flourish.