Consulting Checklist for Physical Therapists

This resource outlines key considerations for allied health clinicians seeking to enhance their consulting practices, focusing on adapting communication styles to individual client needs and facilitating positive change.

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Understanding Client Stages of Change

The first step in effective consulting is understanding your client's stage of change, a crucial factor in determining the most appropriate consulting style.

The three stages are pre-contemplative, contemplative, and action. A pre-contemplative client is not yet considering change, while a contemplative client is thinking about change but has not yet taken action.

An action stage client is actively making changes.

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Adapting Your Consulting Style

Your consulting style should align with your client's stage of change.

For clients in the action stage, a directive style is often effective, providing clear instructions and guidance.

For clients in the pre-contemplative or contemplative stages, consider a more guiding style that explores their perspectives and motivations.

If your client is distressed, a following style may be more appropriate, offering support and reassurance.

Directive Style

Clearly stating instructions and providing direct guidance to facilitate change.

This is most effective for clients already committed to action.

Guiding Style

Encouraging self-reflection and exploration of options, empowering the client to take ownership of their progress.

This approach is suitable for clients contemplating change.

Following Style

Providing support and reassurance, focusing on building trust and rapport.

This is helpful for clients who are distressed or hesitant about change.

Identifying Ambivalence

Clients may express ambivalence, meaning they want to get better but are hesitant to make the necessary changes.

Be alert for the word **"but"** in your client's statements, as it can be a signal of ambivalence.

For example, "I want to be able to walk without pain, but doing exercises always makes me worse."

Address this ambivalence by exploring both sides of the issue and helping the client weigh the pros and cons of doing the excises and living with pain.

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Respecting Client Expertise

Remember that your client is the expert on themselves.

While your expertise lies in your professional skills, your client has a unique understanding of their experiences, preferences, and limitations.

Avoid assuming you have all the answers or trying to solve their problems by giving unsolicited advice.

Instead, focus on empowering your client by helping them identify their own solutions and strategies for managing their condition.

This is particularly important with clients managing chronic injury or disease.



Understanding Client Motivation

It's essential to understand why your client wants to get better.

What have they lost because of their injury, and why is it important to them?

Asking questions to uncover their motivations can be very powerful.

For instance:

"How has this injury impacted your daily life? " or "What things are you no longer able to do that you would love to do again?"

And lastly, "Why is (insert activity) important to you?"

Understanding their motivations can strengthen their commitment to making changes.

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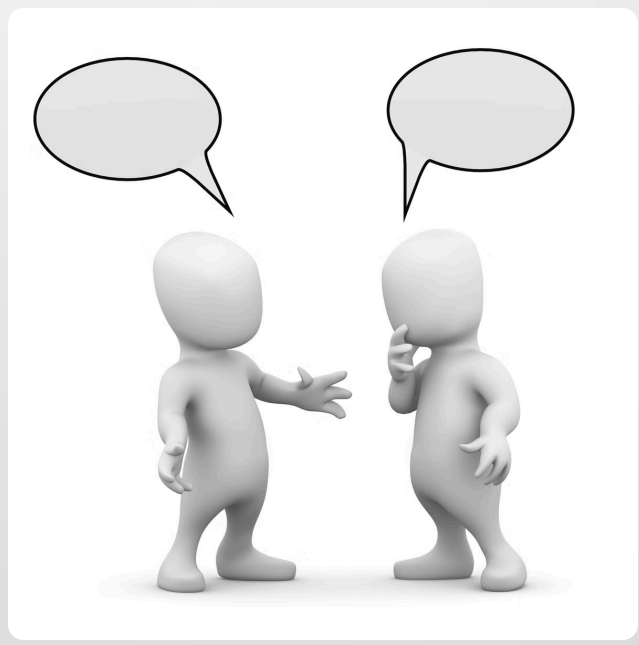
Time Management Strategies

When working with talkative clients, it's helpful to establish clear time boundaries for the consultation.

Agree on a specific time frame for listening to their concerns or de-escalating strong negative emotions and then politely get permission to either continue the conversation or move onto the problem they have come to you for help with.

You might say, "I'd love to hear more about.... We only have (time frame) for this session. Would you be against focusing on (specific topics) now?"

Conclusion: Building Effective Client Relationships



By understanding your client's stage of change, adapting your consulting style, and building trust through effective communication, you can create a positive and supportive relationship that helps your clients achieve their goals.

Remember that your role is to empower and guide, not to dictate or solve their problems.

By focusing on client-centred care, you can make a significant difference in the lives of those you serve.

Transform patient care with bespoke coaching and workshops—contact me to **book a call!**

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