

Fiscal Therapy

Boost your clinic's bottom line by adding cash-based specialty services.

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Managing a successful physical therapy practice requires a mix of business smarts, creativity and a knack for marketing. In today's competitive environment, expanding your focus beyond traditional therapeutic care can diversify your offerings, extend marketing initiatives and boost the bottom line.

And the benefits extend to your patients. Fitness-based specialty services can enhance treatment outcomes for a range of acute and chronic conditions, and add variety, challenges and an element of play to rehabilitation programs.

Three potent ways to develop new revenue streams are by offering new products and services, improving reimbursement, and implementing a comprehensive marketing and communications plan. Each of these key areas deserves a closer look.

Add Fitness-based Services

Capitalize on the fitness craze and the advent of an active baby boomer population by integrating Pilates, yoga and other fitness-based modalities into the practice. Many fitness companies offer customized performance programs with equipment, such as balance training, golf rehab and cycling. Adopting these models can help patients and improve your profit margin.

Integrate fitness-based formats.

If you have specialized training in Pilates, yoga or other fitness approaches, consider integrating the concepts of core stabilization, breathing, imagery or proprioceptive training on a balance trainer into existing rehab programs. These concepts complement rehab for chronic pain and return-to-play clients. They also add revenue and generate referrals.

Develop a specialized Pilates or yoga program.

Many practices offer specialized services for women, golfers, overhead throwers, people with back pain and other specific populations. Do what motivates you and fills a market niche. For instance, implement a Pilates program for dancers and figure skaters, or a yoga program for bicyclists and runners.

Offer fee-based after-care programs.

Contract with a local fitness center to see patients once a week, or hold small group classes in Pilates, yoga or balance training at your clinic for a fee. You can limit classes to former patients or open them to the community.

Use your equipment.

Reformers, stability chairs, arc barrels, yoga blocks and straps can be used in many ways. Apply this equipment to small group training or rent devices to patients after discharge.

For instance, one Minnesota-based rehab clinic allows former patients to return after discharge to use a Pilates reformer for \$15 per hour. Clients don't work one-on-one with a therapist. Instead, they are under the supervision of a

Pilates-trained therapist during business hours. You can also conduct small group classes in the evening.

Sell fitness equipment.

Equipment that simulates Pilates reformer exercises or reinforces meditative yoga principles can be a potential revenue source. You can offer stability balls, foam rollers, weighted balls, magic circles," yoga blocks, mats and straps to clients. DVDS, videos, study guides and books can also help increase revenue and bring traffic through your doors.

Contribute articles.

Submit articles to professional and consumer-based publications (both print and electronic), and author rehab-focused Pilates or yoga-based books and DVDs to showcase your expertise and build credibility.

These vehicles can also lead to short- and long-term revenue building opportunities. For instance, lecturing at local universities and conferences, making presentations to referral sources and producing DVDs can increase revenue if you're willing to invest the time.

In addition, conduct interviews with local magazines and newspapers to become the local "expert" on Pilates, yoga or fitness topics. This exposure leads to increased provider referrals and direct-access clients.

Sharpen Billing Skills

As you add these new services, make sure you get paid for them. Billing for therapeutic rehab using yoga, Pilates and fitness-based modalities is no different than your current charging practices. Begin with a measurable baseline of a patient's functional limitations at home, work, school and in the community, and set goals accordingly. Select CPT codes based on exercise intent and functional limitations, and provide sufficient documentation.

For instance, coding from a yoga or Pilates-based perspective relies on the intent of an exercise-whether it's neuromuscular re-education, exercise or therapeutic exercise. Document the intent of the intervention and your client's limitations to support the charge. The CPT codes most commonly used for Pilates and yoga-based exercise in therapeutic rehab include neuromuscular re-education (97112), exercise (97110) and therapeutic activities (97530).

With neuromuscular re-education, Pilates and yoga-based exercises can restore normal muscle recruitment patterns, stabilize the lumbo-pelvic region or scapulae, or improve proprioception, coordination and posture. For example, a yoga-based chair pose can teach patients to dissociate the femur from the pelvis or maintain proper knee alignment without compensatory strategies. Also, Pilates movements can normalize transverses abdominis recruitment or abdominal bracing.

Pilates and yoga exercises have a purpose, which helps identify the exercises that may be covered under the exercise CPT code. Stretching, strengthening and endurance-focused exercises are common examples. Pilates moves such as a side leg series, bridge roll-up or spine stretch forward can be billed under exercise, along with yoga-based moves such as the downward facing dog or tree pose.

Finally, exercises that can fall under the umbrella of therapeutic activities include the yoga-based chair pose, or single-leg-in-table-top using the reformer

or a foam roller. These exercises can retrain movement for transitioning from sit to stand in weight-bearing or semi-weight-bearing positions.

Spread the Word

Marketing can make or break your new business channels. If you offer cash-based fitness services, you must set yourself apart in a competitive marketplace. Here are some strategies.

Create a marketing communications plan.

Begin with these questions: What makes sense for my practice, and what skills can we offer that will bring in more revenue? What's the investment and the potential return? Can the practice sustain a Pilates or yoga-based initiative?

Do a market assessment.

Complete a market assessment that includes a pro forma and competitive analysis of health clubs and other practices in your area. What do your patients and referrers want? What are the community demographics-young or old? Will people pay out of pocket?

Examine recent trends in reimbursement, employment and the community. Consider space, location, staffing skills and equipment. Do you have the right equipment and enough space? Evaluate the risk of not expanding your practice portfolio, and chart an exit strategy in case your program doesn't take off.

Determine a target audience.

Use your revenue goals and market assessment to pinpoint your target demographic. This may be physicians, fitness trainers, current and former patients, or middle-aged consumers in the community.

Create a program identity.

Your program's identity must be more than a brochure or a Web page. It can range from graphics and a marketing kit to a literature system. Consistent, layered communications tactics are best.

Sell it.

Many rehab clinicians aren't comfortable in the role of salesperson. However, if you want to increase profits you must perfect the skill of face-to-face communications with a target audience.

Meet with providers and patients, provide site tours and offer free program trials to build a referral base. Follow up with direct-mail letters, and advertise in health care and community publications.

Go "on record."

Cultivate relationships with local reporters to become a go-to media contact on all things musculoskeletal, Pilates or yoga. Distribute news releases about services and provider updates via e-mails or newsletter.

Regardless of your specific strategy, stay consistent. There's no magic bullet in the marketing game. Your efforts must encompass several creative avenues and be sustained over time. And make sure all managers, staff therapists and front desk personnel are on the same page.

Sky-high profits don't arrive overnight. Improving your revenue comes from a sustained, deliberate process that pays off gradually. Evaluate your efforts regularly, and complete formal evaluations at 6 months and 1 year to measure the

success of a strategy. This gives you the chance to stick with what's working, tweak it slightly or revise the entire campaign.

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