Hosting an Open House for your Practice

Are you opening a new practice or introducing new equipment or services? Celebrating an anniversary or taking on a new practitioner? Simply looking for an effective and fun way to market your physiotherapy practice?

Consider holding an open house. A well-planned and executed open house can:
- Invite the public and health professionals to learn more about physiotherapy and your practice.
- Increase physiotherapy profile in your public practice facility
- Introduce or raise awareness of your practice in the community and among referring physicians.
- Attract new clients and grow your business.
- Thank existing clients.

An open house is also a chance for busy professionals to interact with clients and health colleagues in a fun setting. It gives staff an opportunity to show off skills in an informal, relaxed atmosphere, and it boosts staff morale by involving everyone in the planning process. Here is a list of key elements that will help you plan and host a successful open house.

1. **Plan early**
   - Allow 4 – 6 months to plan your event, and 4 weeks to announce it

2. **Involve your team**
   - Form an open house planning committee
   - Brainstorm ideas for events, education, and activities

3. **Identify your audience**
   - Too wide of an audience dilutes your message. Decide: are you targeting potential clients? Physicians and other health professionals? Suppliers or vendors? Are you targeting a particular client demographic? Are you focusing on special services (sports, public practice programs, seniors, clients needing evening/weekend services)?
   - Focus your events and activities towards your target audience

4. **Choose a date and time**
   - Avoid scheduling conflicts with major holidays, long weekends, major community events or major sporting events
   - Try to choose a time that best work for your target audience
   - Offer a 3-4 hour window for guests to drop in

5. **Create a budget. Include items such as:**
   - Refreshments
- Staff (if outside of regular work)
- Suspension of practice services if open house is during regular hours
- Decorations, brochures and printed take-away materials
- Advertising and signage
- Invitations/mail outs
- Giveaways (freebies, raffles/door prizes)
- Professional cleaning the day before

6. Plan events and activities
   - Try to have interactive and hands-on activities
   - Invite people “behind the scenes” to get an inside look at what you do
   - Offer a tour of the facility
   - Feature your practice’s strengths
   - Feature your treatment approach and philosophy
   - Consider inviting a celebrity, athlete or person of note who has benefitted from your services
   - Provide an educational presentation, and attempt to arrange a Continuing Medical Education (CME) credit for physicians (or present a pre-accredited CME lecture)
   - Involve neighbouring businesses – have a joint event with the Food Bank, or the seniors’ centre, etc.
   - Invite related groups to participate with demos and short presentations - Heart and Stroke, Arthritis, sports group, Chamber of Commerce
   - Invite high profile hospital leaders to speak
   - Vendors/suppliers can have info booths
   - Raffles and door prizes (good way to get contact names and info)

7. Plan a menu
   - Have plenty of food available (consider having a catering service provide food)
   - Provide simple, practical items (finger foods, cookies, etc.)
   - Provide simple beverages (coffee, juice/punch, water, wine)

8. Advertise
   - Ad materials should include reasons/benefits of open house
   - Include a map and directions to your practice. Promote giveaways, activities and food
   - Mail out invitations at least one month in advance. Consider using bulk mail/postcard style to keep costs down
   - Follow-up with an email invitation 2 weeks before the event
   - Ask people to RSVP by fax, phone, email
   - If responses are low, have a phone committee contact invitees a few days before the event
Consider using a company that sells consumer mailing lists (can be found in the phone book under ‘mailing lists’). Mailing lists can be based on criteria such as geography, income, age or marital status.

If your open house is ‘business-to-business,’ consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce or business organizations to access resources and contacts.

Invite ‘the neighbours’: surrounding businesses may attend, donate prize items or provide advertising space.

Invite local dignitaries and organizational leaders.

Include an announcement on the bottom of your emails, correspondence and invoices for several weeks before the event.

Post fliers in your reception area or facility.

Advertise in local papers one or two weeks before your event.

Send out a press release (see PABC Website, Members’ Area Business Resources/Marketing Branding Advertising/How to work with the Media and also Marketing/Communications Kit/Media Release template) approximately two weeks in advance to local newspapers, radio and TV stations. Be sure to find something news worthy – a gap you are filling in the community, a new treatment approach or technique, your specialty, your connection to the community.

If in a health authority, connect with the communications department for brochure assistance, advertising, media relations, official photographers, etc.

Hang a banner or flag.

9. Prepare your space
   - Assess your surroundings. Does anything need repair? Painting? Preparation for an open house is a good time to deal with annual maintenance.
   - Don’t forget the outside. Attend to debris, landscaping, etc around your entrance.
   - Engage a professional cleaning service before your event.
   - Decorate the reception area (flowers, plants, balloons).
   - Provide signage for parking, washrooms, different areas in the practice, events and activities (if scheduled).
   - Have a colleague take a fresh look and offer insights for polishing the look.

10. Have free goodies available
    - Provide a take-away brochure for your practice (see PABC Website Members’ Area/Business Resources/Marketing Branding Advertising/How to prepare a Brochure and also Marketing/Communications Kit/Brochure template).
    - Have info sheets on physio services (see PABC Website Members’ Area/Marketing/Brochures for Patients) and remember to include a description of the tools and equipment you use, as well as your treatment approach and philosophy.
    - Have the PABC TV ads showing on desktop computers or projected on a wall or screen.
- Provide physicians with your clinic referral pad with description of physiotherapy and the clinicians’ credentials (degree and post-grad credentials)
- Pens, fridge magnets, phone pads with your practice name, logo and contact info
- If you are a family-focused practice, don’t forget the kids! Colouring pages, stickers, balloons, etc.
- Approach neighbouring businesses – they may donate prizes for door prizes/raffles
- Vendor/supplier booths can give away goodies; or vendors/suppliers may provide items to give away

11. Prepare staff
- Prep everyone on roles for the day
- Have nametags made up for staff
- Brainstorm a list of FAQs for your practice; make sure everyone knows the answers

12. On the day…
- Close your practice early to allow time to prepare
- Do a walk-through to make sure everything is in place
- Make sure washrooms are clean and well stocked
- Have a host/hostess greeting all guests and provide a nametag – guests also want to network and know who’s who
- Have staff mingle with guests
- Thank each guest
- Have fun!

13. Follow up
- Thank-you’s to all vendors/suppliers, businesses that donated items
- Thank-you’s to presenters and special guests
- Thank-you’s to all staff
- Update your mailing lists (if raffles and prize draws requested contact in