

Setting up a Biodynamic Massage Practice - Part Two

By Gill Westland

Part 1¹ of this series of articles looked at what nourishes life energy; how to support yourself to be able to sustain a practice; and considered issues about a therapeutic environment suitable for biodynamic work. This article will look more deeply at yourself as a therapist and begin to consider how to link yourself, biodynamic massage and your clients together.

Specific considerations about marketing Biodynamic massage
The practice of Biodynamic Massage (BM) involves a relationship between yourself and your client with you using Biodynamic massage as the primary vehicle for the relationship and the healing process. In this respect selling Biodynamic massage differs from selling a product like double glazing. With double glazing it is fairly easy to establish what the customer is buying, any follow up services and the cost of all of this. However, even with something like double glazing there are less tangible factors such as the status of the particular product, into account. The main difference in selling biodynamic massage is that although the 'product' advertised is biodynamic massage, it is not the main 'product'. Your name will be linked with your product and your relationship with the client is central and the ambience in which you make that relationship. Additionally, there are no guarantees about what the consumer will get in terms of benefits or otherwise. The constant interplay of the three elements, Biodynamic massage, the therapist and the client need to be held in mind.

Biodynamic massage

Therapist Client

Biodynamic massage is further away from consciousness in the general population than other forms of massage such as aromatherapy and Swedish massage. These other forms also fit more readily into fairly conventional ways of selling products - mass advertising, gift vouchers, giving discounts to clients who introduce their friends to you etc.

Biodynamic massage is growing steadily in a more 'underground' way, mostly using networking as the main way of transmitting information about it. Inevitably as a Biodynamic massage therapist you will be involved in educating the public about your work and in contributing to a shift in consciousness in the culture. I feel that a lot of the ground work has been done for this and that we are not far off from being able to be a lot more high profile in public with Biodynamic massage. This process needs to develop in a "biodynamic way". This means being attentive to how the energetic charge is in different situations. What is the energetic interest in biodynamic massage? Is the interest ripe? Alongside nurturing the public interest in biodynamic massage there need to be more training opportunities and more nationally available therapists. Again these three elements go hand in hand. More in the media about biodynamic massage eventually stimulates an impulse to reach out for biodynamic massage, but builds frustration when no-one is available in the local vicinity to meet the impulse. This is negative publicity.

Training

Public Therapists
awareness

Do you have what it takes to set up a business?

Having considered something of the particular issues about selling biodynamic massage I want to turn to the therapist part of the equation. Both CPD and Chiron are training students mostly to work in private practice. However, CPD has also deliberately targeted healthcare professionals (as well as others) to train as Biodynamic massage therapists. This has come about because trainers at CPD have experience of working in the N.H.S. in a variety of contexts and a desire to make Biodynamic massage more normalised and possible for people who are less likely to be able to access relatively unknown therapies. Biodynamic massage therapists with recognised healthcare qualifications stand the most chance of being able to work in the N.H.S. using Biodynamic massage, but they will be involved in “selling” an unknown therapy to colleagues and will have special issues to face out of working in the N.H.S.

This article will be assuming that mostly people want to work privately. When you set up a biodynamic massage practice, you will be setting up a small business. Before you go too far it is necessary to do some hard thinking. This is required to ground your fantasy into a concrete reality. In the process of doing this it is important not to become downhearted or ecstatic in the process, but also not to be unrealistic in your expectations.

The National Westminster Bank has various booklets for people wanting to set up a small business, which are recommended. One of their booklets posing questions for those contemplating running a business as a full time and principle way of earning an income asks the following:

(Tick or cross your answer)

- I am self-disciplined and disinclined to let things drift
- I have the full support of my family
- I am ready to put in 7 days a week if necessary
- I can get on well with people
- I can make considered decisions
- I can cope with stress
- I do not surrender under tough going
- I can learn from my mistakes
- I can take advice
- I am patient, I expect a long haul
- I can motivate people
- I am in good health
- I am enthusiastic
- I am aware of the risks
- I have specific aims²

To this I would add:

- I am involved in the community and know a lot of people
- I am willing to get to know more people
- I am courageous
- I can cope with disappointment
- I believe in myself
- I believe in biodynamic massage as a form of healing
- I am willing to make at least three years of sustained effort to get it started

If you answer “yes” to most of these questions you are ready to proceed, if there are lots of “no’s” you will need to consider how to change some of the no’s into yes’s. You will probably need the help of your supervisor and fellow Biodynamic massage therapists.

Next, you will also need to consider whether you want to set up an independent practice with yourself as the one member of the business. You may not have much choice about this. You might also consider joining a complementary health practice, if there is one. This could give you a daily support network, but it will not automatically give you a practice. You will still need to work to create your practice.

If you like the idea of being in a group of biodynamic massage therapists and this seems a possibility, you might also consider forming a group practice. You do not need to all live in the same area. I know of various complementary health practitioners, who travel around a county to work together in different locations. Being in a group can provide support and opportunities for personal growth, but you will also need to deal more directly with envy of others and feelings of competitiveness. There are likely to be differences in who does most of the work, who gets most clients and who feels undervalued. Business structures need to be worked out clearly. Small group businesses often fail because the financial responsibilities have not been legalised and the relationships turn sour. Typical business structures are the limited company and the partnership.

If you favour a more democratic structure with business as well as social aims, then you might consider setting up a co-operative. I have been involved in setting up three trading co-operatives and found it demanding work but a positive environment in which to learn new skills, and to share problems and anxieties. On the down side decision-making can be slow, frustration-inducing and not responsive enough to situational demands. We are fortunate in having two Biodynamic massage therapists who have worked for a local Co-operative Development Agency, Peter Cockerton and Rosie Bell. Both have published work on co-operative businesses.³

The relationship that you have with Biodynamic massage
Having thought a bit about yourself as a business person and what sort of situation you may like to work in, you will need concurrently to consider your relationship with Biodynamic massage and how it fits into your life. I am assuming that you have enough interest in Biodynamic massage to have joined the Association of Holistic Biodynamic Massage Therapists and are probably talking with peers already about your plans. Implicit in the next section are the questions: Do you believe in what you are selling? Are you a person who can talk about Biodynamic massage with conviction? Are you a walking advert for Biodynamic Massage?

So the next step is to begin to explore how Biodynamic Massage has enriched your life. CPD trained therapists might want to refer back to their therapeutic journals.

Exercise

You might want to sit comfortably, to let your eyes close and to recall what it was like to first receive Biodynamic massage. What was it like subsequently? How has Biodynamic massage changed your life? Was there anything difficult for you with Biodynamic massage? Give yourself plenty of time.

Then write a list or draw a picture representing your recollections. It is important for you to connect with your experience.

The following is a list of comments from students and clients about Biodynamic Massage:

“I still have the same situation - my mother is still very ill, but I don't feel so troubled by it. I feel calmer inside.”

“My headaches stopped after six sessions and I don't take work home now.”

“I am less driven. I feel more in charge of my life.”

“I have had other sorts of massage before, but with this, I felt as if my therapist was talking to the cells of my body. It was very personal - I'm a bit embarrassed by that.”

“I discovered that I didn't feel parts of my body - that was scary, but also exciting as I got to know my legs.”

“I slept really well after only one massage. I gradually learned that I was in the wrong job. I just drifted into it. Now I'm doing a fine art course.”

“I got amazingly vivid dreams after the massage sessions.”

“My guitar playing improved dramatically after biodynamic massage as the tension in my body disappeared and I noticed that my breathing deepened. I didn't know quite how tense I had been.”

“I was shocked to discover that I didn't like being touched much.”

“I felt really well attended to and received. It's made me realise what's important. I've taken early retirement from teaching. I want to train in some sort of therapy.”

“I just felt really good after Biodynamic massage - like I was smiling inside.”

“I felt put back together. I can't say more. I'm puzzled about how it works. I don't understand it and all this energy talk, but I know it's doing me good.”

“I word process all day and used to have a stiff neck. The stiff neck went after one session, but I then realised that I had a lot of stress in my life, so I've decided to keep having sessions.”

Next spend some time considering whether you have experienced sufficient benefits yourself from Biodynamic massage to know how profoundly it can impact on people and to be able to inspire others to give it a try. If you have, great! If not, what happened? Do you need to receive some more sessions of biodynamic massage? Perhaps you need to talk it through with a supervisor/therapist/peers to understand what happened?

The considerations about your relationship with Biodynamic massage are crucial. You cannot expect to sell the service of Biodynamic massage, if you do not really believe in what you are doing from the depth of your body. This is true of any business. You may recall the national jeweller, Gerald Ratner who was asked how his company could sell jewellery so cheaply. He replied, "Because it's cr.. !" The price of shares in his company plummeted overnight, never to fully recover.

If you think you are selling rubbish, are half-hearted, sceptical, ambivalent or doubting about biodynamic massage as a baseline enduring feeling, then you are very unlikely to get any clients coming to you. You need to be able to differentiate in yourself the occasional lows about yourself and Biodynamic massage from severe, ongoing doubt. The occasional lows should not deter you from your business mission and should be seen as passing phases. Severe, ongoing doubt which engulfs you will make it unlikely for you to succeed and probably need therapeutic intervention.

Next, spend some time considering where Biodynamic massage fits into your life now and how you would like it to be in the future?

Exercise

You may want to close your eyes and let your thoughts and imagination drift for a while. When you have given yourself ample time, again record your musings. You may be surprised by what you discover.

The following are examples of possible discoveries:

You may find that you enjoyed the training, made some new friends, but don't want to practise, but would like to keep in touch some how.

You might discover that BM is not really for you - you are actually more drawn to healing.

You don't want the intensity of relationship and the emotional side of it.

You may rediscover how much you enjoy giving massage, how well you feel doing it and want to do it more.

You may remember how positive your feedback was from others about your touch and therapeutic presence.

Perhaps you are frightened by the commitment to people. You discover that you would not so easily be able to go away when you like.

You might believe in BM, but doubt yourself, or your business skills.

You would like to practise BM, but not in the private sector. You would like to be in a team.

You would like to keep it as a part time/occasional part of each week. Perhaps seeing one or two clients each week.

You may want to make it the centre of your life, changing your main way of earning income from your nursing job to BM.

You may realise this will be your third career, when you take early retirement.

You may want to combine NHS work with work in the private sector.

You may be more convinced that software engineering is not your life path and become firmer in your resolution to change your work.

Business skills

When you have come to a realisation of where BM fits into your future life, the next step is to consider how realistic this is.

In order to decide how realistic your vision is, further areas of inquiry are needed. You will need to look more closely at your business skills, your contacts, the location of your business and the local competition.

Let's suppose that you wish to sustain yourself entirely with BM in the private sector. In coming to a conclusion about feasibility, the following considerations may help you:

Business skills

What business skills do you have?

- Have you organised anything in your life before? It could be as simple as running a stall at a car boot sale, helping to fund raise, being on a committee, being part of a pressure group.
- How independent minded are you?

- How skilled are you at managing money?

Contacts

- What networks do you belong to?
- How gregarious are you, who do you know?
- Are you willing to broaden and increase your networks

Market

- Do you live in a complementary therapy friendly area?
- What do you know of the complementary therapy market locally?
- Are there sufficient numbers of people in your area earning enough and sympathetic enough to spend their disposable income on your services?
- How much do people expect to pay in your area for private therapy?
- What's the competition like?
- What income do you need to have coming in over a year?
- How many clients each week would you need, to sustain this plus overheads?
- What do you have that will single you out from competitors?

Location

- How accessible are your business premises?
- What is the parking like?
- Will all of your potential market be driving to you?
- What is public transport like?

Business location

Your BM practice needs to be accessible to your potential clients. Most therapists start out working from home. In deciding whether this is for you, you should consider where you live.

Are you living in an affluent area? Will some clients be put off by your conspicuous wealth? Do you intend to work mostly with well off clients? Do you live in a run down area? Will some clients be put off by fear of venturing into your part of town? Will your children be around, when you are working? Will some clients feel that you ought to be with your baby/toddler rather than giving the client a massage? Will your children be audible in the background? What will you do with the dog/cat? Will some clients with allergies not be able to visit you? Do you have regular visitors, who will ring doorbells etc.? Apart from the practicalities of location, your business location needs to appear plausible as a healing environment to your potential clientele. The "ritual" or routines around receiving Biodynamic massage need to be acceptable and meaningful to your client. In psychotherapy effectiveness research, this "ritual" plays a significant role in the healing process.

Female clients tend not to like visiting male therapists at home and particularly not late at night. If you are a female therapist, particularly if you live alone, how do you feel about unknown people, especially men visiting your home?

Currently, I do not feel that biodynamic massage needs to be located on the High Street to gather "passing trade", although this has been tried in London. However, it could be located in a Health Club, the sort of place offering a gym, swimming pool and various health classes such as tai chi, and yoga. This would give you access to potential clients, who already have an interest in health and a successful club will already have sorted out accessible premises.

Generally your premises need to be located in a favourable part of town, with good public transport, car access, easy parking, and it helps if you are not far from the local station. If your clients will need to use parking meters or a residents parking scheme this all needs to be thought out. It creates frustration if parking is difficult and meters need to be fed, during a session. Getting your business premises right can give you competitive edge. It all counts towards a successful business.⁴

The potential market

You will need to do some research to be able to know the likely market for biodynamic massage in your area. You will need to discover the population of your town/area and the population of the surrounding area. What occupations do people do. What percentage of the population are engaged in these occupations? What is the unemployment rate where you are?

If there is high unemployment and you live in a village in a sparsely populated area, you are very unlikely to get a practice together. Practising in the private sector you will need to have clients who are mostly in regular, secure work. Professional people are most likely to consider trying a complementary therapy, but this is not exclusive and will continue to change as public awareness grows.

What other complementary therapists are there locally? How many of them are there? How much do these charge for sessions? You may well be competing with these therapists for clients in a small area. What do you have that they do not have? Are there any complementary therapists who you might collaborate with you. For example Therapeutic massage therapists may be willing to refer those with stress related issues for biodynamic massage.

Income needed per annum

Next consider how much your current lifestyle costs. Do you intend to carry on living at this level? To help you know how much your current lifestyle costs consider the following:

• What income do I have each month? Include wages/unemployment benefit, investment income etc.

Then consider how much you are paying monthly for the following:

- Council tax
- Water rates
- Buildings insurance
- Contents insurance
- Life insurance
- Pensions
- Gas
- Electricity
- Other fuel
- Telephone
- Maintenance
- Court orders
- Car tax/insurance
- Travel expenses
- Housekeeping (food, window cleaning, cleaning materials etc.)
- Rent/Mortgage
- T.V. licence/rental
- Clothing
- Childminding
- Leisure
- Sundries e.g. gifts
- Loans/debts repayment

When you have worked out your monthly income and monthly expenses, compare them.

You should have more monthly income than expenses. Then multiply income and expenses by 12 to calculate your annual income and expenses.

Now turn to your potential business.

Without taking into account the overheads of running your business yet, consider how much you could charge each client for a single massage. The price you will be charging for BM needs to fit in with local expectations about fees in the area.

Let's suppose that you can expect to receive £25.00 per session for BM. You are likely to get cancellations through family holidays, sickness etc and you are unlikely to have clients who want to see you around national holiday times. Client holidays and your holidays may not coincide. For example in Cambridge I currently have a number of clients who are connected with the university. These people tend to travel to conferences and often to take their holidays in September. In contrast I have children of 7 and 10 years and so we take our main holiday in August. I do work at half terms, but some of my other clients with children are unable to come at half term. So when I estimate my annual earnings I need to take all of this into account. I need to earn enough in the fuller weeks to offset the leaner times. There will also be fluctuations in client numbers due to economic and seasonal variations beyond your control. If you look at numbers of likely clients over about 40-44 weeks of the year, this

will give you an idea. Lets suppose that you are eventually able to see about 15-20 clients per week, then your income will be:

Clients x weeks x pounds e.g.

1 client x 44 weeks x £25.00 = £1100.00

10 clients x 44 weeks x £25.00 = £11,000.00

15 clients x 44 weeks x £25.00 = £16,500.00

20 clients x 44 weeks x £25.00 = £22,000.00

Is this sum near what your needs are? In fact this sum needs to be more than your current financial requirements, as it will also have to cover the running costs of your business. If not, do you want to change your lifestyle? Will you need to continue another job, perhaps part-time? It can take about 3 years in Cambridge, which has a population knowledgeable about complementary therapies and discriminating about them to build a practice. How will you sustain yourself until your practice has grown to the size of your financial needs?

Next begin to look at your likely overheads. BM overheads are rent, tissues, paper rolls, utilities (gas, electricity, etc.) stationery, telephone, computer, office equipment, advertising, networking, laundry, ironing. There will also be supervision (this can be about £30-35 weekly, if you are wanting to have a full practice), further training, attendance at meetings, buying books. You will also need income for a pension, N.I., tax, perhaps an accountant, provision for sickness. And in the long term monies put aside for redecorating, replacing equipment and accessories like blankets. Your expenses can be divided into capital costs i.e. the costs of setting up e.g. decorating and furnishing a room, buying a massage table, office equipment etc. and running costs e.g. telephone, gas etc. You may want to do your own accounts or to find an accountant, but these costs need to be recorded and separated out from each other.

In conclusion

You will need to do some thorough thinking, before embarking on your business venture, but time spent on this builds the solid foundations for a successful practice. Many small businesses fail because the good idea has not been thought through and rooted properly. In the next article in this series, I want to spend more time considering the therapist's relationship with the client. This will start to explore marketing and networking.

Good Luck with your endeavours!

References

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 3. See for example Cockerton, P., Gilmour-White, T., Pearce, J., Whyatt, A., : Workers' Co-operatives, a Handbook, Aberdeen Peoples' Press, 1980.
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