

A Call for Supervised Practice

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“I’m afraid I’ll lose my clients if I raise my rates... One of my clients was told by a fellow professional that she should not receive work from anyone else but him... I feel guilty when clients don’t feel better at the end of the session... Most of my clients still want me to do deep tissue and my body is hurting more and more... Whenever I work with her I start to feel helpless because she seems so miserable.”

These difficult issues from professional bodyworkers are typical of the many that are brought up in continuing education. Clearly, bodyworkers, like other professional caregivers, have a strong need for on-going support and advice in dealing with these kinds of concerns. Other professionals handle this need for support by regularly meeting with supervisors. Unlike medicine and psychotherapy, we have no requirement for professional supervision. While we are required to do continuing education, we are not required to be supervised by specialists or peers.

In 1993 when I began working with a supervisor every 3 weeks, my whole professional world shifted. I realized that I would no longer be acting alone. Since then, I’ve had a regular context for exploring ethical concerns, professional boundaries, and my own personal issues. Out of this professional relationship has come a sense that I am meeting my clients’ needs as responsibly as possible. I can honestly state that these one-on-one sessions with a supervisor have helped me mature and expand professionally much more than continuing education classes. No matter how much we learn in classes, the major difficulties in growing professionally and maintaining a practice have little or nothing to do with techniques. Most of us are doing our best to be responsible and ethical practitioners. I believe that what is missing from our profession as a whole are the benefits that supervision can bring: questioning, refining, and restructuring all aspects of our work. Supervision is especially important to us because in our profession most practitioners work independently. In my experience, supervision gives us new feelings of confidence. We are able to bring the support of others into our work with clients.

Who are supervisors? Borrowing the model from other forms of care giving, supervisors are senior practitioners, teachers and leaders in the field, and persons with special training to supervise others. We can also be supervisors for our colleagues when we meet together for the express purpose of listening to one another, supporting and maturing our professional lives. There are three basic supervision contexts – *peer, group, and individual*.

Peer supervision refers to a group of professionals who regularly meet to share experiences from their practices. Peer groups sometimes hire a consultant to work with them on a specific topic (e.g. fibromyalgia, counter-transference, dealing with insurance clients and providers, small business advice).

Group supervision refers to a group of professionals who contract with a designated supervisor – usually someone with more professional experience. This supervisor leads an on-going process in which individuals in the group present cases to one another...this can be done informally or formally with documentation. The focus of the group is not on fixing problems with clients but on honestly evaluating their own personal issues as practitioners.

Individual supervision occurs when the practitioner sees a supervisor on a semi-regular basis for consultations on all issues of his/her practice. In my experience, this one-on-one professional relationship is probably the strongest and most beneficial of all forms of supervision.

My hope is to bring the theme of regular supervision to the massage community in this state and to the bodywork field in general. I am interested in hearing your thoughts and experiences with regard to supervision. This is the first of what I hope will be an on-going series of articles on this theme.