

## We do more than manual therapy!

How often do clients have an expectation that passive treatment will “fix” them? Explaining your role at the beginning will lay a good foundation for the rest of the consultation. Sample script: “Have you seen a Physiotherapist before? What was the experience like? I work a little different from some Physios.” Highlight the difference between “passive” (hands on) and “active” (patient takes action, develops skills, learns to problem solve) treatment. Explain you can help them with “what” to do and also “how” to do it in a manageable way for their circumstances. Then ask “How do you feel about that?” If the client chooses to pursue manual treatment first, that gives you an opportunity to discuss the possible contributing factors and ask the client about the potential benefits of managing these factors and the consequences of not managing them.

## Assess the client as well as the condition

Ask the client what they think are the main issues before launching into an assessment. This may enable you to save time by performing a more targeted assessment. Asking the client what they think are the main issues, will allow you to spend more quality time on the things impacting on their pain or function (e.g., difficulty performing tasks at work) rather than conducting a 30 minute assessment. Sample script; “What do you feel are the main issues impacting on your pain or function?” Asking RICK about self-management strategies and exercises will save you from wasting time on talking about issues the client is not motivated to engage in.

## Pen ownership

Inviting the client to write down what was discussed can increase the success rate up to ten times! Sample script: “That pen and paper is there for your own use if you come up with some good ideas. It is just a matter of remembering things when you leave this consultation.”

## Messy Head Syndrome!

How often do clients (and even ourselves) feel overwhelmed with the many changes that need to be made to manage their pain or improve their function? Outlining general categories or areas to work on over time will help the client to prioritise and focus on one item at a time. Sample Script: “Working on all of these issues is too much to consider in one go. Is there one area that you feel you would benefit the most from working on it?”

‘Messy head’ may also be the result if clients don’t understand or feel that they have control of pain triggers. Encourage a systematic, problem solving approach to set up a positive expectation. If clients can’t identify what influences their pain, explain how ‘BEST’ can be used as a framework to think about the different types of pain triggers. Behaviours – Do they plan activities thinking about what loads their tissue? How do they habitually move or perform tasks? Emotions – explain how stress influences the pain response. Situations – Does the pain vary with different situations? For example, increased pain in the morning might be due to position, inflammation or stiffness overnight. Thinking – Do they avoid exercise/activity because of concerns about causing more damage? BEST can also help you to identify enablers for dealing with pain triggers.

## **Assume unsteady until proven ready!**

Make no assumption that just because a client has turned up to an appointment they are ready to take on an active role! It does mean that we have an opportunity to assist them with prioritising and managing their musculoskeletal health. For example, use summaries of evidence-based treatment options of common conditions to inform the client about possible treatment pathways. Possible script for acute low back pain: “Research shows the most effective treatment is to individualise the recommendation to ‘stay active’ and assist your understanding of the problem; passive treatment and medication are often helpful; however complete bed rest is harmful.” Then ask “What do you think you would get the most benefit from today?” Ask the client what benefits they hope to get out of making changes rather than simply telling them. This allows you to assess their knowledge and also increase rapport and trust. Sample script: “Everyone would like to be pain free however this requires some time and effort to keep your body balanced and healthy. What benefit do you think you would get if you were to learn how to use your body more efficiently?”

## **Offer a menu of options**

We all like to feel that we have choice. Being able to choose from a menu reduces resistance and increases client readiness. Rather than giving clients one option at a time, offer a menu of strategies or suggestions. Sample script: “Here is a list of strategies to manage neck pain at work/home. Would any of these options suit you?”

## **If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!**

Even if the client knows what to do, are they confident that they will go out and do it? Asking the client what may get in the way and what they need to do in order to achieve their goal will increase their likelihood of success. Scheduling in time to learn new skills or exercise regularly requires thought and planning.

## **Watch out for over-doers!**

The body finds it hard to adjust to big changes so increasing activity or exercise by 50% or more for example would be difficult to sustain. Encouraging clients to start off with making 10% or manageable changes is more realistic and sustainable in the long term. Once they have adjusted to this change, encourage them to increase by another 10%.

## **What you track is what you get!**

Focusing solely on pain can be demotivating. Ask the client how they will know they are improving to help them focus on the positives and keep them persisting over time. Use a variety of tracking measures such as range of movement, functional ability, their feeling of control or energy levels. Encourage repetition and skill development by tracking activities in charts, by accumulating objects in a jar over the day and/or by reviewing progress with video clips taken on a phone (if possible).

## **Trial and Error**

Encourage a trial and error philosophy. Remind clients that it is not them that failed if a strategy has not worked. Sample script: “Remember if the strategy does not work it is not you that failed, it is just the strategy. So keep a note of what does and doesn’t work and we can discuss this at the next consultation”.

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