

## A PERIPATETIC PRACTICE

Rose Hurley

I began the conventional way after graduation: a few patients seen at home then moving to an ideal room in a chiropractor's practice in Exeter. I paid £4 per hour for the room and benefited from the chiropractor's referrals. Perfect - until the rent was substantially increased. Dilemma: home working seemed impossible as I had moved out of Exeter to a small seaside flat. Another good consulting room would be hard to find, and I was reluctant to increase my fees to cover the higher rent. Being a tubercular type I began to realise that I was already getting restless with going to the same workplace every day and needed a new approach. I thought about a domiciliary service but knew it would not be right for everyone and was sure I would lose some patients. I needed to offer them a choice. I telephoned them all, explained about the rent rise and offering instead home or workplace visiting, seeing me in my flat or in a new consulting room that offered me one-off bookings at an hourly rate. The response was excellent. Most patients were delighted to be seen at home or work and only a few wanted alternatives. My peripatetic practice was born. Here are some of the 'rules' I quickly learnt in order to make it a success.

*A reliable car is essential.* I had never bought a new one before but I used my savings to buy a small Fiat Punto. I believe it saves me several hundred pounds a year in maintenance, insurance and running costs. It has also given me peace of mind with reliability.

*A 30 mile radius from home is my range.* I may charge extra for longer distances if I cannot combine the journey with something else I want to do.

*My charges are £40 for first consultation and £20 for follow-ups with very little variation for special cases.* I decided against different charge bands and let the losses of travelling and hiring a room counterbalance the gains of working from home. Strangely, no one has ever asked me to charge them less when they come to my flat, they only express surprise that I will visit them with no extra charge.

*I never accept hospitality, even a drink of water.* I establish this on the first booking to avoid disappointing patients when I cannot stay for tea and cakes afterwards. Also more drinks mean more visits to the loo and I believe it is unprofessional to use a patient's bathroom except for hand washing. I have learnt where every public convenience is within a 30 mile radius of home! If I get very hungry or thirsty I have an instant picnic box containing drinks, muesli bars and pots of rice pudding in the car boot.

What to wear and what to take are ongoing dilemmas. I have learnt not to wear full skirts on windy days - rummaging in the boot for the right book or remedy leaves no hands free for skirt control. I don't wear plain black or navy clothes in homes with dogs, cats, budgerigars or other loose animals or small children. I never wear a coat because some homes don't have anywhere to put it; and the

footwear problem remains unresolved sometimes, especially if I follow a visit to a muddy Dartmoor farmhouse with one to an elegant town house in the city.

There seems to be a Homeopath's Law that says that whatever you take for the visit it will not be the right thing. If I leave my sphyg or auroscope at home to save weight I can be sure that they will be needed; if I stagger around with bags of books, remedies or equipment I can be fairly certain that they will not be the right ones. The best solution seems to be a large remedy case in the car and a basket and briefcase with variable contents for each patient. I still run out of hands if the patient needs a hug or a touch at the front door, however.

*It is vital to leave enough time between visits.* Holiday traffic, bad weather or road repairs can often add 5-10 minutes to a half hour journey. I prefer to arrive early and park a few hundred yards from my next venue and spend the time checking casenotes, listening to the radio, eating a rice pudding or all three at once, rather than arrive late. Some patients seem to regard my punctuality as a magic trick.



How can patients contact me? I only do visits between 9.30am and 4pm. That way I miss rush hour traffic and patients know they can usually find me at home before or afterwards. I have contemplated a mobile phone but reception is poor in deepest Devon and the cost outweighs the benefits so far.

There are several other bonuses to this way of working. It is tax-friendly as my travelling expenses are deductible, my patients' home or work environments give good clues for casetaking, I enjoy being on the road and it has given me a full practice in less than two years. As I see about half my patients in my home I can only assume that my practice would only be half full without my peripatetic service. I highly recommend it.