

# Taking care of YOU and the business side of your practice

## CELIA CHAMPION

Owner and Business Consultant, Painless Practice



Physiotherapists who choose to open their own practice might do so because they desire more autonomy, free time or money. This article highlights some of the issues practice owners face when embarking on their own business and how, by engaging with professional business advice, physios can deliver the same care to themselves and their business, as they do to their patients.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES TO SUPPORT PHYSIO FIRST QAP

- 1 Understand the importance of defining the aims of your business from the outset.
- 2 Be aware that it is essential to know your numbers.
- 3 Identify what are the key areas to focus on.
- 4 Appreciate the value of frameworks and systems.
- 5 Know that the benefits of your business do not rely solely on you.

Physiotherapists, who have spent years training to be a clinician, understand that it is natural to continuously develop their clinical skills throughout their careers. For some reason, however, many clinicians feel that when they start a practice, or even if they have been running an established practice for years, they should be able to do it on their own. Some practitioners might not know about the range of support they can tap into to help them maintain a healthy business.

Sadly, many practice owners often end up working long hours trying to balance the business aspect of running their clinic whilst working on their own clinical load, and this can result in their overall per-hour earnings hardly seeming to be worth the effort.

By becoming confident business owners, physios can enjoy all aspects of their practice and achieve the vision they initially set out with.

The following are case studies of Physio First members who have embarked on the journey of taking care of themselves and their business by accessing the benefit of the services of Painless Practice, through our Physio First commercial relationship, and who tell their stories in their own words.

### Kenny Thoms NeuroPhysio Scotland

I run a neurological physiotherapy practice across central Scotland. We see people with stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, and other neurological conditions, normally visiting them in their own homes. The practice also provides rehabilitation technology that helps people maximise their function and quality of life.

#### Q. What led you to seek business support?

I felt like my business had evolved organically to the point where I needed help to improve the structure, efficiency, and resilience of the business.

#### Q. What were your desires?

I wanted a better work-life balance, but also to further develop and expand my

business. I wanted to be able to invest in new technologies and reduce some elements of my organisational and managerial workload.

#### Q. On a scale of 0 to 10, how comfortable were you on the business side of your practice and how has this improved?

4/10. I'm giving myself some credit here because I still had a good business with great staff and a decent financial return. It was just a bit chaotic. Although I'm still on a journey, there have been huge changes for the good. Now I would give myself a 7, as there is still plenty of room to improve.

#### Q. How would you describe the support you received?

The support provided me with the structure to work through essential aspects of running a good business. It also made me realise that it is OK to take time out to work on the business, not just use all the time to treat patients.

#### Q. What specific changes did you make?

As a group of neuro physios, we undertook a project during lockdown to understand our values better and to agree our purpose and vision for the future. This led to a rebrand of our business that included the language we use, the tone of our communication, logos, photographs, icons, fonts, colour schemes and a new website.

I realised I could not actively develop the business on my own whilst maintaining a full clinical caseload. I therefore employed a practice manager and admin support. I also installed a practice management system, HR management software, a new email and IT system, and invested in IT support.

I increased our fee structure to better reflect the expertise within the practice, with almost no negative outcomes. I changed how I organise my own working day, how I prioritise tasks, and at what times of day I do certain activities.

#### **Q. What surprised you?**

How little I was earning on an hourly basis beforehand.

#### **Q. What results have you achieved?**

Things run more smoothly, the practice is more accountable and my life is easier. I'm finding time to do the things I've been thinking of for years.

Financially, when compared to our last pre-Covid year, our turnover has increased by 31% and our profit margin by 70%, so we are now in a much more stable financial position.

We are also more resilient to change because at least two people are able to perform all the essential functions of the business. Things are far less reliant on just me on a day-to-day basis.

#### **Q. What would you advise someone starting out in private practice?**

Get some support. Plan for the non-clinical aspect of work. Make sure you have a really good think about what your aims are in the first place. Be clear about your purpose and values and let that guide you. It can be challenging but also extremely rewarding. Go for it and good luck!

### **Lorna Saunders Positive Steps Physiotherapy**

Positive Steps Physiotherapy is currently a team of two physios and three physio assistants. We specialise in paediatric physio and adult neuro rehab. We cover Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire.

Since COVID-19, we have also offered remote sessions to expand our reach. We have a physical clinic that we use to see patients and we do a lot of school, specialist college and home visits.

#### **Q. What led you to ask for business support?**

I attended the Painless Practice Starting in Private Practice workshop at a Physio First conference, which made me realise that I really did need to start getting a bit of advice.

#### **Q. What were your pain points?**

My practice had grown organically and became overwhelmed and was very much being reactive to things instead of being proactive. I felt like I was just firefighting. I knew things weren't right and I didn't know what it was I had to fix.

#### **Q. What were your desires?**

I wanted to develop a practice where I had a team who are as passionate about my clients as I am. I wanted to reduce my clinical hours and increase my income. I wanted to feel in control, in balance and calm and have a clearer idea for choices in the future.

#### **Q. On a scale of 0 to 10, how comfortable were you on the business side of your practice, and how has this improved?**

When I first started in private practice my business knowledge was zero. I was probably about a 4 or 5 nine months ago when I joined the Painless Practice Mastery Programme. I would say I am now a 7 or 8.

Although I haven't done all the work needed, I feel I know what I need to do now. I'm in a much better place with regard to having a plan and goals. It's much more structured and less overwhelming.

#### **Q. How would you describe the support that you've received?**

I think the support has been amazing, and what is really good is the variety of options. The 1-2-1 coaching keeps me accountable and I really enjoy the group strategy sessions covering the different

topics. Being in the group itself is another massive benefit of being able to share experiences with other professionals, not just physios.

#### **Q. What specific changes did you make?**

I block time in my diary to focus on the business. I have proper contracts and better systems in place, and I am proactively supporting my team who are now working really well together. My team are passionate about what they do and having our core values clearly articulated has had a massive impact. I am also able to distinguish between opportunities and "shiny objects" and have the confidence to say no. I am confident with my figures and pricing too.

#### **Q. What surprised you about this process?**

I can't believe how far I have come in nine months since joining the Mastery Programme. I am surprised at how much can be done in a relatively short period when you stop trying to multi-task and focus on one thing at a time. It's about understanding what you need to do and when you need to do it. If it wasn't for COVID-19, I would have joined the programme sooner and I wish I had.

#### **Q. What results have you achieved?**

My business is in order and I feel more confident as a business owner. I am able to make quicker, better and more informed decisions. Because I am not constantly firefighting, I am able to take on new opportunities, like taking students on [placement], which I would have felt too overwhelmed to consider before.

My turnover and profitability have also grown considerably and I pay myself a constant salary, even in quieter months. When COVID-19 hit, before the furlough scheme was announced, I was driving down the M6 in tears realising my business would only survive for two or three months. I now have a six-month contingency fund in place so that I can cover my outgoings if something like COVID-19 happened again and we didn't get support. 🙏

**“A BENEFIT OF PHYSIO FIRST IS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH PAINLESS PRACTICE, WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT THAT UNDERSTANDS WHAT PHYSIOS ARE LIKE, AND HOW WE RUN AS BUSINESSES”**

In the last few months, I have also been able to allow myself a day each week where I don't see clients so that I can focus on the business.

**Q. What advice would you give someone starting out in private practice?**

You categorically need to understand the numbers. I know it's really boring and I know it's really not your thing, but you need to know what's going on.

Get help; we private practice business owners come in as the technician, the physio, and pick up the business side of things along the way. Get advice and coaching and someone to keep you accountable along the way.

**Q. How valuable do you regard the relationship between Painless Practice and the Physio First community?**

I respect Physio First and during COVID-19 they were very much there for us. Painless Practice has a very good understanding of the physio and health side of things compared to the millions of business coaches trying to get you on LinkedIn and Twitter. They know what we are like and how we run as businesses. I knew that the minute I heard Celia speak at the Physio First conference several years ago. Having Physio First and Painless Practice working together just sits comfortably with me.

**Lisa and Nigel Mann  
The Jersey Sports & Spinal  
Clinic**

The Jersey Sports & Spinal Clinic, founded by Lisa and Nigel Mann in 2007, is a team of six physios, a soft tissue therapist and Pilates instructor as well as a great front of house and back-office team. We provide physio, Pilates,

strength and conditioning, and sports and soft tissue massage treatments. We have a fully equipped rehab gym for practical assessment and treatment sessions to enhance our patients' recovery.

**Q. What were your pain points?**

There were a few. We felt isolated; we have done most of the work on our own, so the ability to work with others and share and explore ideas, learn from others and realise that what we are doing is actually OK is reassuring.

We think that the general lack of teaching in this area, both at under- and postgraduate level, makes it a challenging thing to plunge into. There is a need to know how to stay on top of the many areas of managing a business which is overwhelming when you are the clinician too.

**Q. What were your desires?**

To work less, be confident that we were doing the right things, build the business we wanted, offering the services we believed in with a happy team who also believed in the company's ideals. We wanted to create clear processes to improve our customer experience and make it easier for the team to deliver this.

**Q. On a scale of 0 to 10 how comfortable were you on the business side of your practice and how has this improved?**

5-6 when we started the course. Like all learning, you rapidly realise that you don't know as much as you think you do in some areas, and you know more in others. Then courses like the Mastery Programme open your eyes to lots of other things and before you know it you realise that you were probably at 2-3 and are now getting to the 5-6 level.

**Q. How would you describe the support you received?**

It has been great.

We had been Painless Practice Success Club members previously and still are. The Mastery Programme is a deeper dive and provides a structure to cover all the basics of building a business. We initially did the shorter five-day challenge and we were quickly convinced that this would help us. We like the ability to have group sessions followed by 1:1s, the Q&A "ask me anything" sessions and a book club all in a regular monthly format that push us to grow. The areas addressed really resonated with us and made us realise that the business could be functioning on a completely different level.

The really invaluable part is that the coaching is not just from Celia. Other business owners in the group have great ideas and Celia involves a lot of other complementary businesses as part of the course such as providers for processes and reporting, website and online marketing, HR and GDPR support, etc.

We both wish we could have had this course when we started our business!

**Q. What specific changes did you make?**

Where to begin? There have been so many different things from beginning to get good data to future proofing the business. Because of the Mastery Group involvement, we honestly don't think there is an area of the business that has been left unchanged.

**Q. What surprised you?**

We are not really any different to all the other businesses involved in the Mastery Programme. We are all having the same difficulties, but there is no one solution to suit us all. Often one of us will have had the same issue previously, which helps enormously so we are not reinventing the wheel. We also had a perception that chiropractors had much more business preparation as part of their undergraduate training, and were therefore ready for private practice, but it simply isn't the case.

### Q. What results have you achieved?

Better business planning, more structure, better data, more understanding of how we work and what we need to do so others can work with us.

### Q. What would you advise someone starting out in private practice?

Try it before you buy it! Owning and running a practice is not for everyone. Talk to others before you think about starting up in private practice. There's a lot of rewarding, hard work involved that will take you away from your clinical role. You could work for another private practice first before you go all in.

Remember that you have to earn a living from this and pay the practice bills so make sure you charge what you are worth. That's probably the hardest thing. Often, we feel guilty charging for our skills and expertise because of our NHS background. Don't be! People are happy to pay if they get the results they want from it.

Take the time at the beginning to get things right. Don't be afraid to take ideas from other professions and businesses and apply them to physiotherapy.

### Q. How valuable do you regard the relationship between Painless Practice and the Physio First community?

We'd love to see this develop into a much bigger shared collective of ideas, training, support, and help. There are other groups around for clinical CPD, but there isn't much for the business management side of things. The Painless Practice

offering is as specific to therapy led businesses as you can get. We have to recognise that the CSP is predominately, perhaps understandably, focused on the NHS and, whilst the private practice special interest group is new this year, a community like Physio First and Painless Practice that actively supports physios who go out into business alone can only improve the way we work, and look after ourselves, in private practice.

### Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The Mastery Programme is currently all online so there's no travel to events. It's a great sounding board and a voice of reason when you are feeling isolated and have no idea what is normal, be it to do with contracts, salaries, bonuses, KPIs, marketing, retaining clients, budgeting, etc.


We'd love more of you to come and join the Painless Practice family. The more of us there are, the better the overall experience will be for all of us; and all for the cost of a couple of clients a month. Try it for a year. We don't think you will be disappointed.

### Summary

As these testimonials demonstrate, a massive benefit of being a member of Physio First is in the access to support and advice from the whole Physio First community; whether from peers, many of whom are volunteer post-holders, the dedicated office team, or from strategic partners, such as Painless Practice.

Every connection is part of the value of being a member of Physio First, whatever the size of your practice, or your level of experience, and my aim at Painless Practice is to help those who desire it, to develop and grow a healthy business that cares not only for the patients that come through your door, but also takes care of everyone who is involved in the success of your business.

The Painless Practice partnership with Physio First is part of that connection and goes beyond the courses we offer and includes our participation in the Physio First community meetings, advice within member bulletins, and involvement in publications that help steer members towards understanding the business side of your practice.

For more information about the relationship between Physio First and Painless Practice, and for details on how to access a free review of your business, go to the Physio First website <https://www.physiofirst.org.uk/benefits/physiotherapy-specific-business-advice/painless-practice.html> 

### CONTACT DETAILS

[support@painlesspractice.com](mailto:support@painlesspractice.com)  
[www.painlesspractice.com](http://www.painlesspractice.com)