



Maintaining personal and practice safety in physiotherapy.

All employers, business owners, contractors and employees have an obligation to create and maintain a safe working environment. And to do this, we all need to think about what makes our workplace unique in terms of the risks and the strategies needed to keep it safe.

There are a few ways in which physiotherapy practices can pose risks to the personal safety of practitioners, other people who work there and patients. One-on-one consultations mean that the practitioner is always alone with a patient. Small practices can lead to practitioners being the only worker present in a clinic. And the varied hours of clinics will often see practitioners working late at night.

Below are some tips to help you create a safe workplace for everyone who comes into your practice.

- > When booking in a new patient who you know nothing about, consider booking them in during a busy time of the day when there are other staff around, rather than when the practitioner will be in the practice alone.
- > If you have a patient who, for any reason, raises some red flags in terms of the practitioner's comfort levels, only allow them to book in when there are others in the practice.
- > If a practitioner is practicing in the evening and is the only person working at that time, consider locking the front door to the practice. If you do this, explain to patients inside what you're doing and why. And consider your process for other patients who'll be arriving. Will you let them know the door will be locked and that they're to wait outside until you're ready for them? Maybe you'll only lock the door once the final patient for the day has arrived.
- > Installing a buzzer on the front door notifies you when it's been opened, thereby allowing you to be sure when people are entering your practice.
- > Consider installing a reception area camera and post clear signage so anyone who enters understands they're being filmed and will be identifiable. Don't use cameras in treatment rooms.
- > Consider walking patients and colleagues to their cars when it's late, however be sure to consider your own safety when doing this. Provide patients with advice on safe places to park.

- > Always lock your car doors as soon as you get in, and keep in mind criminals can approach from varying angles, so they may be in your blind spot.
- > If the practice is in the home of the practitioner, have processes in place to separate the living space from the practice to protect the privacy and safety of the practitioner and their family members, especially children. And be aware, family members may also breach a patient's privacy or modesty, so ensure everyone in your household understands the rules.
- > Keep records of any uncomfortable, challenging or threatening behaviours from patients, and be sure to save anything that's received via text or email. This information is to be recorded in the patient record. The details on what occurred can be brief, but must be professional, keeping in mind records can be seen by others.
- > Don't contact patients via your personal email or mobile phone or provide these details to them. If you need to contact them while off-site, put your phone on "No Caller ID" so they don't have access to your phone number. If you leave a voicemail message, ask the patient to call the clinic phone, not your mobile.
- > Have a practice policy that advises against practitioners connecting with patients on social media as these connections can contribute to the blurring of professional boundaries. And be sure to understand the privacy settings of any social media platforms used.
- > Discuss any challenging or awkward situations with your colleagues or other healthcare professionals, while maintaining patient confidentiality. This not only provides support when dealing with challenging situations, it can also provide additional tips for how to manage these situations.

It's important to remember that workplace safety laws apply to everyone in the business, including contractors, not just the business owner. A safe work environment is in everyone's best interest so open communication about any concerns is the best way to protect all staff members.



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