



How to Have Conversations With MDs (Pt. 1)

Felice Dunas, PhD

Editor's Note: Originally written for acupuncturists, this article has been altered to reflect the chiropractic audience, for which it is equally relevant.

This article is meant to help you have successful, pivotally important conversations with medical doctors that could determine the way they view your work and if they choose to refer patients to you. The opportunity to connect with an MD may first come to bear when one of their patients is also under your care.

You also may have the opportunity to meet with other practitioners of allopathic medicine, including physical therapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, doctors of osteopathy, psychologists and many others. The following information is also relevant for meetings with these professionals and potential referral network sources.

What Outcome Do You Want From the Interaction?

When you have the opportunity to interact with an MD regarding a shared patient, your goal should be to introduce chiropractic simply and with researched data. You want them to leave the conversation interested in learning more and comfortable with how medically knowledgeable you are about the patient you are sharing. (*Note:* This knowledge must be shared in their language, not yours! More to come on that.)

You want your questions answered and a "yes" at the end of each interaction, even if the "yes" is a 5-minute follow-up call in a few months as the patient progresses or a "yes" to you sending them a packet of studies on chiropractic efficacy relevant to the case you share.

You want the door unlocked for more dialogue and information exchange. Don't plan on kicking it wide

open in a few conversations or becoming an MD's teacher. Pacing is important. It could take years of demonstrating your ability, asking relevant questions and providing education in short conversations before an MD feels comfortable or has time to consider referring to you.



You want professional respect, which you can gain by properly presenting yourself, and you may have some specific questions for the MD that you want addressed. To get the answers you want, you must ask questions in a simple and concise manner.

What Outcome Does an MD Want From the Interaction?

MDs are, legitimately, protective of their patients and of the legal responsibility they bear by referring patients to anyone, especially a chiropractor whose field they do not fully understand. MDs want to see that you have the experience, credentials, professionalism, intelligence and language skills to have constructive conversations with them. They want to know you can provide answers for them and ask astute questions. To achieve this, you must show you:

- Respect their time and do not take up more than they have to offer
- Are well-educated about and respectful of their system of medicine
- Are able to listen to their concerns and respond to their questions thoughtfully, seriously and quickly
- Ask questions that are within the confines of their medical expertise
- Communicate in a language they understand and are familiar with
- Have evidence (which they find convincing) that would make your participation a legitimate

- possibility for addressing certain conditions in their practice
- Are not desperate for their business and are not hard "selling" or trying to convince them of your or chiropractic's legitimacy. You are merely presenting information and offering them an opportunity to consider its viability
- Are mature in your perspective and do not put your modality on a pedestal
- Can improve patient results

Time Sensitivity

Doctors have little time and bandwidth to learn about what you do. They are often in crisis-management mode and the bottom-line, simple approach is all they have time to hear. The only question they need answered is, "How can your care improve my patient?" They need that answer in a few sentences.

"Numerous studies have shown chiropractic adjustments can reduce back pain and is, I believe, playing a role in why Sophia's lower back is feeling better. If you would like, I can send you some studies documenting chiropractic's benefits for lower back pain. I am glad I had a chance to introduce myself."

Everything you say must be approached with this understanding. Less is more. The person on the other side of the table or the other end of the phone is time crunched and stretched to the max, so make your conversations friendly, much shorter than you would like, and productive.

Preparing for MD Relationships – Do Your Homework

As with any business meeting, you should know something about the person on the other end of the phone. There are websites to help you gain information about physicians. These may be related to their individual or group practice(s), the medical school(s) or hospital(s) with which they are associated, peer-review sites, etc.

It takes only a few minutes of research and one sentence of conversation to break the ice and leave a positive impression.

Show Them the Research Supporting the Patient's Care

Find studies relevant to any patients you share or to the specialty of that physician's practice. Be careful in choosing your studies. If no studies have been done that fit exactly, present those that are more general – pain control, for example, or post-surgical healing time.

Editor's Note: In part 2, Dr. Dunas provides tips for your first & follow-up meeting with an MD.