

Hiring a Consultant

FINDING THAT HIGHLY QUALIFIED ADVISOR TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF YOUR FACILITY

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The medical field and spa world are increasingly complex. The medical, legal, and business issues can be overwhelming. Medi-Spas, for example, have grown from a cottage industry to a booming industry. Along with this growth comes increased competition, greater scrutiny, and more regulation. This growth has spawned another industry: consulting. Many physicians and medical spa owners have turned to consultants to grow their business or to ensure legal compliance.

HOW TO CHOOSE A CONSULTANT

Step 1 >> The first step should be to determine the specific goal and purpose for the consultant. Many consultants specialize in growing your business, while others focus on compliance issues. A few are able to handle both. In today's

environment it is important to focus on both issues. For example, a program to boost retail sales could violate laws or ethical guidelines. Therefore, focusing on one area alone is not prudent.

Step 2 >> The second step would be self-assessment of yourself (or the management team). Are you reactive or proactive? This is more important than anyone may realize. You are forming a relationship with a consultant, and it is important to know how you will interact with the consultant. If you are proactive, you will have many questions prepared and issues to be addressed prior to meeting the consultant. In this instance, you will need to select a consultant who is comfortable with this personality type. A consultant who desires to be given free reign and not questioned during the process may not be an appropriate choice.

If you are reactive, you will respond to the questions and issues raised by the consultant. A consultant who thrives on feedback from you may not be your best option. Neither mindset is better or worse than the other, but it is critical in the ability to interact with a consultant to choose one who fits your personality type. A proactive medical practice or spa may not gain the same benefit by choosing a reactive consultant.

Step 3 >> Naturally, the third step is to find a consultant with similar mindset. This determination can be achieved during a short interview process. This process can be verbal or in person, and it should be easily determined if there is synergy between the individuals. Feel free to ask how the consultant typically initiates a project. Does he or she send an assessment form or

questionnaire? Do they provide information about themselves? This will provide clues into their consulting style.

Step 4 >> The fourth step is perhaps the most critical.

Determine the credibility and experience of the consultant. Countless times I have encountered a medical practice or medical spa in which I inquired why a troublesome or

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concerning procedure, protocol, or program was initiated. More often than not, I was told that a consultant advised the facility. Unfortunately, the growth in medicine and medical spa environment has exceeded the ability of qualified consultants. Seemingly overnight, there was a wealth of new consultants who professed proficiency in all areas of facility management: management, marketing, and legal. Clearly, these "experts" could not have gained the knowledge so quickly. Therefore, a background suitable to the industry would be an issue in the consultant selection process.

Unfortunately, many consultants have given poor advice, and the facility may not even be aware of it for months or years, if ever. The argument that a consultant advised you may be helpful in resolving the legal or regulatory issues, but it is not a defense to a regulatory violation! I have encountered numerous problems from a legal standpoint, and a consultant advised that the program

was acceptable. In fact, I have yet to work with a spa or medical practice in which I have not uncovered a serious legal mine field. Similarly, I have yet to review a medical facility in which there was not tremendous untapped business growth potential.

Accordingly, care needs to be given in determining whether the consultant has adequate experience and background to properly guide you. Many consultants repeat things which they have heard in the field, but they do not have any substance to back the statements. There is a lot of misinformation today, and you need to be concerned with what is fact and what is fiction.

DOES THE CONSULTANT HAVE ALTERIOR MOTIVES?

This leads to another consideration which happens to be a pet peeve of mine. Too many times I have encountered a medical or spa facility which claims to have worked

with a "Consultant." After inquiring who the consultant was, I discovered (much to my chagrin) that it was an industry professional who stood to gain from the advice given! An equipment manufacturer or skin care representative can provide valuable advice and insight, but their interests are in growing their business. Greet with skepticism advice rendered when the other party has an interest in the answer. Would it surprise you to discover that a private label skin care representative would encourage you to expand your retail center? How many laser company representatives got facilities into problematic situations by giving the advice that a particular situation was acceptable? The answer is MANY! Such mistakes can be VERY costly to a practice or spa.

There are considerations for a consultant even after you have gone through the above process and selected a consultant. For example, you may elect to hire more than one consultant because of the diversity or





complexity of issues. Accordingly, the ability for the consultants to interact and understand each other is vital to the success of the new program. Frequently, I work with a local attorney for a facility, and it is best if I have an open relationship with that person. This is more important than you may realize. Any number of times I was advised that an owner “ran the scenario by” their accountant or attorney. The reality is that few attorneys and accountants have experience in the unique and heavily regulated environment which we have chosen for our livelihood. It may “sound good” to him or her, but their experience is an issue as well.

SCOPE OF WORK

Another consideration is your budgeting expense for the consultant. This is always an issue; but in this

consideration, it may not be in your best interest to limit the type and nature of work to be performed. It has become the habit to indicate to a consultant that you only want counsel on a particular issue. This may not be your best option. It may be prudent to allow him or her to take a look at the entire operation. This will enable the consultant to uncover previously untapped opportunity or to find a trouble spot of which you were previously unaware. If you think enough of a consultant to hire him/her, do yourself a favor and do not tie his/her hands. For this reason, it is essential that the consultant visit your practice or spa. He/She really needs to see for himself/herself the facility and operation. This will add to the expense, but it is well worth the added cost. A consultant who desires to work from his/her office and not visit the facility may not be a wise choice. This would certainly be a red flag.

WHERE TO FIND A CONSULTANT

It is difficult to find qualified consultants. You certainly cannot find one in the telephone directory! Trade shows and word-of-mouth referrals are a good source. However, I have discovered that many consultants (including myself) will not disclose a client list; and many facilities may not talk about their consultant because of a perceived competitive advantage and the desire not to give away their secrets. Regrettably, consultants have been a rich source of information to other facilities regarding competitive advantages which some facilities have developed. Assure confidentiality of your information by utilizing a confidentiality agreement.

The best advice would be to interview as many as possible to ensure a comfort level. Your ability to properly communicate with your consultant and to effectively discuss your specific goals is crucial to the success of your project. **ATI**



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Padraic Deighan has lectured at many national conferences including the Association of Dermatology Administrators and Managers Annual Conference, the International Spa and Fitness (ISPA) Annual Conference, Patients Unlimited Marketing Consultants (PUMC) seminars and the South Jersey Academy of Dermatology. Padraic has numerous written publications on the subjects of cosmetic surgery, medical spa topics and medical management. He has been a medical/legal editorial advisor and contributing editor of Aesthetic Trends & Technologies journal since its inception. He has also participated in the development of the first Physician Practice Management Company (PPMC) specific to dermatology (NEWCO).