New demands, greater practice opportunities
Early career psychologists find both

Joshua Cohen, PhD, of Rockville, Maryland, is a private practitioner who works with adolescents and adults. Allison From, PsyD, serves as director of the counseling center and is an assistant professor at Spalding University in Kentucky. She also maintains a small private practice.

Doctors From and Cohen have each been in practice fewer than seven years and lead busy professional lives. Although their practice situations differ, they have similar perspectives on the opportunities and challenges facing early-career psychologists.

Both practitioners see opportunities for new psychologists to work in a variety of settings and to play increasingly diverse roles. Dr. Cohen offers several examples. “In today’s marketplace, psychologists can expand their practices by providing business consultation services, working with their medical counterparts in various facilities and engaging in policy development.”

Meanwhile, From observes, psychologists are making greater inroads into hospitals (see article on page 15) and corporations. She sees psychologists as valuable for helping organizations focus not only on patients or consumers, but also on staff. “Having psychologists as part of the team strengthens the core of the organization.”

Dr. From sees growing marketplace competition as placing new demands on psychologists. She believes that new practitioners in general may need to be more creative than their predecessors had to be when they started out.

Like many of her early-career colleagues, Dr. From finds that diversification—having more than one professional role and/or working in more than one practice setting—is often imperative for building a successful practice. Some psychologists have been successful, she observes, by carving out a “niche” practice that meets a specific market need. “You need to have skills that help you stand out among your peers,” says From. “Specializing [in a particular practice area] can do this for you.”

Niche practice development isn’t always clinical in nature, as Dr. Cohen has found. He attributes part of his success in practice to applying his knowledge of business to private practices. Growing up in a family that ran a business gave him an early start in thinking like a business person. As he honed his business sense and cultivated his knowledge and experience of running a psychology practice, Cohen began giving presentations on the business of practice (see article on page 4). That led to opportunities for authoring articles for professional journals, increased interaction with the business community and even more opportunities for public speaking.

Fostering business relationships and friendships with professionals in other arenas—such as accountants, medical professionals and attorneys—has helped Cohen learn from their expertise. And the connections have boosted his client base. For example, he has received referrals from physicians whose patients experienced trauma-related symptoms following serious automobile accidents. Dr. Cohen says one of the valuable lessons he has learned by making these contacts is the importance of having a strategy for marketing his services—even though the efforts often do not provide immediate returns. For example, new patients have reported picking up his business card at a presentation he made several months earlier. Cohen views these presentations as marketing opportunities. Since he does not participate in managed care health plans, Cohen believes that growing a successful practice will always require him to market his practice aggressively.

In addition to being patient about seeing results, Cohen says, “the key is to evaluate your marketing strategy over time by continuously tracking outcomes.” He uses a software program to help him manage the task. And when he sends a thank-you note to someone who referred to him, Cohen always puts his business card in the note to help facilitate future referrals.

Dr. From points to another path for new practitioners to build connections. “I think one of the best ways to get your name out there is to join your state organization and begin working with other professionals. See what they are doing and gain ideas from that [interaction].” Dr. From says her experience with chairing committees among other roles with the Kentucky Psychological Association (KPA) has served her well in both her small private practice and in organizational work settings. “It has continued to build my confidence as a leader by giving me
responsibilities and by connecting me with other professionals around the state and throughout the country.”

Similarly, Dr. Cohen has found it invaluable to forge a strong affiliation with the Maryland Psychological Association. The organization has provided tremendous opportunity for Cohen to develop networking and mentoring relationships that in turn have helped him develop his practice. “Joining my state association and becoming more involved has had a spider-web effect on increasing opportunities and connections to potential referral sources.”

Dr. From said that her involvement with KPA also helped her with one of the challenges she continues to face: juggling multiple demands in her personal and professional life. In addition to helping her learn when to push herself harder, From says, “Through KPA leadership, I have learned when to say no.”

Beyond university responsibilities and part-time practice, she is a mother in a growing family. Dr. From places a premium on ‘balance’ and has found techniques that help her maintain it. “I really work at knowing when my plate is too full,” she says.

She also has found it helpful to employ another tactic for maintaining work-life balance: developing a social support network. Research has shown a correlation between social support and lower levels of work-family conflict, and From has put the research into practice. She is part of an active peer consultation group that comprises colleagues who are also good friends. “I know I can call them any time about anything, work or personal,” says From.

Despite the challenges they face, both psychologists are pleased with their career path and encouraged about future prospects for the profession.

“Opportunities for psychologists to engage in work [other than] traditional therapy and assessment have never been greater,” says Cohen. Dr. From adds, “A career in psychology gives us so much richness and depth.”

**PUTTING TECHNOLOGY TO GOOD USE**

With the growth of information technology, tools for marketing a practice have never been more accessible or affordable. Dr. Cohen uses several tactics in his practice to take advantage of technology, including:

**A professional Web site**

Recognizing that a professional Web site is an essential marketing tool, Dr. Cohen used a professional designer to create an online presence, www.JoshuaMCohenPhD.com, for his practice. To help streamline his practice operations, Cohen asks new clients to fill out forms that are easily accessible on his Web site before their first visit. (Web sites designed for psychologists are available from the APA Practice Organization to members who pay the Practice Assessment. Visit APApractice.org for additional information.)

**Online directory listings**

Dr. Cohen participates in the Psychologist Locator provided by the APA Practice Organization as well as the Maryland Psychological Association Psychologist Referral Service. Online listings have helped bring clients to his practice. Similarly, Dr. From participates in the Psychologist Locater and the Kentucky Psychological Association’s “Find a Psychologist” service.

**Cell phone**

To facilitate direct phone contact, Dr. Cohen uses his cell phone as his primary telephone. That way, when a prospective new patient calls, Cohen doesn’t need to be in his office to pick up the call. His cell phone number appears on his business cards as well as on every page of his Web site.