**7 Steps to Building Your Network of Professional Counselors**

By [Chris Adams](http://www.lifeway.com/womensministry/author/chrisadams/)

At a recent LifeWay Women Live [webcast](http://www.lifeway.com/womensministry/2011/04/lifeway-women-live-reaching-women-in-crisis-post-webcast.html) (register for LiveWay Women Live web casts [here](http://www.lifeway.com/event/422/)) one question that came up a couple of times is how to put together a referral list to have handy as you deal with women in crisis.

I found this web article from several years ago that I believe will be helpful written by former LifeWay employee Barney Self, Ed. D. I believe this answers that question well.

Every minister needs to have a network of competent Christian professional counselors who can serve as referral sources. The most obvious place to begin the quest for those resources is in your own church.

1. **Make a list of doctors, therapists, and counselors in your church.**  
Your church may already have a list that has been compiled over the years. Even if you don’t refer individuals directly to these professionals, you can still look to them as resources for finding other professionals who are both competent in their specialty and focused on a vital relationship with God.

2. **Use other churches’ lists of referrals.**  
Healthy, evangelistic, biblically based churches in your area will likely have lists of care providers. These can also be researched and added to your network of trusted caregivers.

3. Utilize Christian organizations.  
In metropolitan areas, groups of physicians and therapists may form organizations like Christian Medical Fellowship or Christian Counselors Fellowship. These groups may provide invaluable assistance in networking with godly caregivers.

4. **Connect with the local Baptist association.**  
Whether your church is Southern Baptist or not, the local Baptist association is a potential resource for information, networking and referral. The Directors of Missions in these offices have often been in a given area for extended periods of time and know a number of the caregivers personally. You can search for your local Baptist association by choosing your state and then viewing the list of associations here: Search State Conventions and Local Associations on SBC.net

5. **Ask state minister relations personnel.**  
Most states have a person designated as a caregiver for the ministry body. Many of these persons have developed trusted lists of caregivers in each area of their state(s) and may be willing to share that information upon request.

6. **Seek information from various national organizations\*.**  
·    The American Association of Christian Counselors: www.aacc.net  
·    The American Association of Pastoral Counselors: www.aapc.org  
·    Focus on the Family: www.family.org  
There are various groups of Christian physicians that can also be found on the Internet, such as the Christian Medical and Dental Association. You can use a Web search to find many organizations.

7. **Determine if other groups in your area are striving to provide similar resources for those in need.**  
Connecting with others committed to assisting those in need and utilizing their understanding can create a win-win scenario of shared information.  
By looking into your own church, community, and region, you are equipping yourself with a personal network of people to whom persons in your area can turn for professional help with a Christ-like approach.  
   
\*Any time lists are utilized from sources other than personal recommendation the trust level for those referrals needs to be in question. That does not mean no one is to be trusted. Instead, it means that trust is an earned commodity.

In this light several questions need to be asked to better understand the caregiver and his/her ability to be trusted.

1.    **First, the caregiver’s scope of practice needs to be determined.** Caregivers need to offer care only in treating those maladies they have been trained to treat. This also means that they need to have experience in doing so.

2.    **Second, the theology of the caregiver needs to be better understood.** How do they integrate their belief into their treatment process? Are biblical reference points used? Is there a willingness to pray with and for their patients/clients? Answering these questions can aid in building a trust relationship with a caregiver.

Barney Self , Ed. D., is a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Resources:

Women Reaching Women In Crisis ([pdf](http://www.lifeway.com/product/005034986/) or [print](http://www.lifeway.com/product/005218405/))

[Transformed Lives](http://www.lifeway.com/e18/shop/?Ntt=transformed+lives&Ntk=All&N=0&D=transformed+lives&Dn=0&Dk=1&Nty=1&Ntx=mode%2Bmatchallpartial&Dx=mode%2Bmatchallpartial&I=1)

[Shepherding Hurting Women](http://books.google.com/books?id=AMOv26YOPr4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Shepherding+Hurting+Women&source=bl&ots=m23kAs9Qft&sig=up-gyfrdKzRgU7zQWJnFMCKKvr4&hl=en&ei=P_ClTe77B4v4swO13K36DA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CBsQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Shepherding%20Hurting%20Women&f=false) by Bev Hislop

Links to other articles dealing with [Hurting Women](http://www.lifeway.com/womensministry/hurting-women/)