



BY JARROD SHAPIRO, DPM

The Power of Cross-Training Your Staff

Consider this an insurance policy against future unknowns.



to do their job very well, but when they are—invariably—absent for some reason, whether due to illness, vacation, or job change, their absence throws the business into chaos.

As a personal example, our lead medical assistant is fantastic. She is able to perform every job in the clinic, from rooming patients, to assisting with procedures, to scheduling surgeries. It requires little input by me to keep the clinic running smoothly with her there. However, if she happens to be out,

Practice Perfect is a continuing every-issue column in which Dr. Shapiro offers his unique personal perspective on the ins and outs of running a podiatric practice.

Clearly, cross-training our staff requires work and some dedication from leadership.

Here in Southern California, we've recently been hit with increasing new variant COVID infections, and it has wreaked havoc on our healthcare community. This is likely true for many parts of the country and other countries as well. There has also been a nursing shortage at our hospitals in addition to increasing patient hospitalizations making for a perfect storm of problems. The same is true with some of the local podiatry practices, where large percentages of our staffs are out sick.

Unfortunately, there seems to be only one way to deal with this shortage—short of putting our heads down and just muscling through with minimal staff. That one way requires us to proactively prepare beforehand for the loss of staff. We're speaking specifically about cross-training.

We all know that cross-training involves teaching staff to do each other's jobs. This makes logical sense; if one staffer is out, then another one can fill their place. However, with both small and large institutions, this is a relatively unusual practice. We seem to like the fact that employee A is able

things just don't run smoothly. The other staff in my clinic are relatively new and do not have the same depth of experience that she does.

Why Don't We Cross-Train More Often?


So why don't we cross-train more often? There are three reasons. First, we become busy doing the day-to-day activities of the job, just keeping up with all that it entails. There's just no time to consider extra training. Second, when our staff become skilled at a certain aspect of the job, we do not

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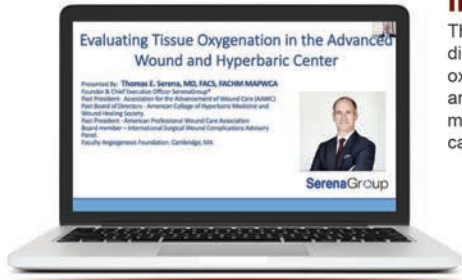
Featured Lecture



Evaluating Tissue Oxygenation in the Advanced Wound and Hyperbaric Center



Thomas Serena, MD, FACS, FACHM, MAPWCA
CEO and Medical Director of the SerenaGroup
Cambridge, MA




0.75 CECH

In this Lecture...

Thomas Serena, MD, FACS, FACHM, MAPWCA discusses the importance of assessing tissue oxygenation. He also compares tissue oxygenation and perfusion as well as how to incorporate the measurement of tissue oxygenation into a wound care practice.

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want to interrupt that efficient flow. A third reason, focal to certain personality types, is the discomfort that learning something new creates, making them less open to extra training.

Clearly, cross-training our staff requires work and some dedication from leadership. There are two counter-arguments to this concept... some may resist cross-training, and better-trained staff members may ask for more pay. Suggestion—actually use this to the practice’s benefit and consider paying

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and training process with little or no notice when a strong staff member leaves or becomes sick. Consider cross-training as an insurance policy against the variably unknown future.

Here are a few suggestions for those considering cross-training staff:

- *Consider a plan before instituting the actual training*—Remember,

course or simply working with a second staffer. They should not be constantly pulled away from their training to do something else.

- *Follow through*—This means helping your staff maintain their training by periodically doing that job for which they’ve been cross-trained. If front office staff are trained to do the back office but then never actually work in the back office, they will rapidly lose the skill.

- *Make it fun*—Remember that some people don’t take well to change or learning new things. Soften that blow by devising methods to make the process more tolerable. For example, discuss the raise that will come after they have trained and showed that they are able to contribute more to the practice.

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fully cross-trained staff more—give them a small raise. This will motivate staff to go through the training, decrease staff attrition, and improve job satisfaction. It’s also much cheaper to give a raise than it is to repeatedly retrain new staff.

The other is the “I don’t have time” argument. The simple answer to this is that none of us have the time to go through the entire hiring

for example, that you might temporarily lose that staffer’s regular position while they are training. Someone needs to cover their workload, and that will require planning to diminish interruptions.

- *Actually cross-train them*—Give them the time and resources to receive legitimate training to gain that important level of expertise. This may require sending them to an outside

With a little planning and proper execution, cross-training has the power to create a resilient and motivated staff that will weather most storms. **PM**

Dr. Shapiro is editor of PRESENT Practice Perfect. He joined the faculty of Western University of Health Sciences, College of Podiatric Medicine, Pomona, CA in 2010.