

3 Change-of-Pace Ideas for Staff Meetings

If your staff meetings have become routine, these ideas will perk them up.

BY BOB LEVOY



Here are three field-tested ideas to enliven staff meetings—and at the same time provide some insights that, in the first two cases, will improve rapport and communication with patients; and in the third case, will result in a lively, team-building activity.

1) The purpose of this first idea is to raise everyone’s awareness of the anxiety that some patients have about office visits. To start the discussion, distribute the following questions:

a) What are some of the things about which you think patients experience anxiety when coming to our office?

b) What are some of the things that you (or we) might do to prevent such anxiety?

c) In situations where prevention isn’t possible, what could you (or we) do or say to the patient that might ease his or her anxiety?

The following are some of anxiety triggers to use to jump-start the discussion with your group: fear of hearing “bad news” from the doctor, anxiousness about needles, apprehension that a procedure will be painful, concerns about the costs of surgery and insurance coverage, and long wait times. List as many as possible before proceeding to the next question.

Regarding the prevention of anxiety, consultant Lynn Homisak and Neil Baum, MD, writing in *Podiatry Management*, have suggested: If pa-

tients are overly nervous during an injection for example, your assistant “can stand beside them, talk to them, hold their hand, and help divert their attention.”

Encourage your staff to think of other ways to allay patients’ anxiety about the issues listed after the first question.

Regarding the third question, consultant Wendy Leebov recommends physicians handle the last few seconds of a seriously ill patient’s visit.

Tell participants: “This exercise will demonstrate some important things about communication. Pick up your sheet of paper and hold it in front of you. Now close your eyes and follow the directions I give you. There are only two rules. No peeking and no questions.”

Then provide the following directions, carrying them out yourself with your own sheet of paper—and pausing after each instruction to give everyone time to comply.

Encourage your staff to think of other ways to allay patients’ anxiety.

Dealing with anxiety that can’t be prevented is challenging and an important topic to brainstorm with your staff. Everyone needs to be involved.

Regardless of the recommendations that result from such a staff meeting, the discussion alone will make everyone more empathetic and understanding of the anxiety patients often have about visits to a podiatrist’s office.

2) This next idea provides a real change-of-pace and takes only five minutes. It will however, drive home the importance of two-way communication with patients. The only materials needed are blank 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheets of paper for each participant.

“The first thing I want you to do is fold your sheet of paper in half. Next, tear off the upper right-hand corner. Then fold it in half again and tear off the upper left hand corner of the sheet. Finally, fold it in half again and tear off the lower right hand corner.”

When everyone has finished, say, “Now open your eyes and let’s see what you have. If I did a good job of communicating and you did a good job of listening, all of our sheets should look alike.” Then hold yours up for everyone to see.

It’s highly unlikely that everyone’s sheets will match and the diversity will probably cause much laughter.

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Ask the group why so few sheets matched and you'll probably hear such things as, "You didn't allow us to ask questions" or "Your direc-

their everyday roles.

Have everyone write on a piece of paper three things about themselves which they think others don't know about them. Two of those things should be true and one should

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tions could be interpreted in different ways"—which becomes the perfect segue into the need for two-way communication when, for example, giving patients post-op or home-care instructions.

3) This next idea is fun, energizing and a good team-builder because people will get to know each other more as individuals—beyond

be false. Then have everyone take turns reading the three things and have the group vote on which one is false.

This simple activity invariably gets people laughing and results in some surprises. That alone makes it worthwhile. **PM**

It is with great sadness that we must report the passing of Bob Levoy.

Bob was a giant in the field of practice management. He was the author of 7 books, the newest of which is 222 Secrets of Hiring, Managing and Retaining Great Employees in Healthcare Practices published by Jones & Bartlett. He a regular columnist for Podiatry Management and was inducted into the PM Podiatry Hall of Fame in 2012. Podiatry Management extends condolences to his wife Martha. Bob will be sorely missed by the entire podiatric community that he served so well for over four decades.



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Podiatry Hall of Fame, and can be reached at blevoy@verizon.net.