

Ensuring the Success of Your Physician Extender



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The success of a physician extender (PE) is contingent on the quality of training, mentoring, supervising, and educating within the practice. For example, the quality of training that a PE receives will have a remarkable impact on his/her long-term success within a dermatology practice. This article will discuss steps and strategies that supervising physicians can implement to maximize the effectiveness of newly hired and future PEs.

Develop a Standard Training Protocol

A comprehensive training plan is essential to the successful integration of a PE within your practice. We suggest establishing a 6-month training period for the PE to work on a rotating basis alongside each physician in the practice. The PE will have the opportunity to observe and learn from each physician, which will provide a more well-rounded experience with varied techniques for providing patient care. A standard training protocol should be developed for the PE to complete before the end of the rotation period. Mastery of certain tasks within the practice—reviewing a patient's history and performing the initial physical examination; assessing and making a differential diagnosis prior to examining the patient with the physician; communicating with medical assistants and understanding their roles; developing communication skills to effectively educate patients; becoming familiar with potential diagnoses including how to treat them; and

following proper coding procedures—should be achieved as part of the protocol. During the initial 6-month training period, the PE should always be shadowing another physician, as he/she is not authorized to conduct independent consultations with patients without state medical board approval.

While the PE is completing his/her training, it also is important for him/her to attend meetings, seminars, and roundtable discussions with the physicians. It also is beneficial to establish a list of required reading, including relevant books and journal articles; for example, Thomas P. Habif's *Clinical Dermatology: A Color Guide to Diagnosis and Therapy*¹ is an excellent resource for a PE.

Mentor Your PE

As the physician, there are a number of methods you can use to assist your PE in adapting to and growing in your practice. While the PE is training, he/she needs a central figure within the practice to provide guidance and leadership. Make yourself available to your PE as a coach and understand that he/she will value your time and guidance. When coaching your PE, remember to be patient. Initially he/she is likely to make mistakes and will not always know the right answer. Take the time to provide detailed instructions and be prepared to repeat things when necessary.

When traveling to a specific destination, you need a map to get you there; the same is true for PEs who are working toward success within a practice. A new PE needs a set of personal goals that will ultimately help him/her in making effective contributions to the practice. As a mentor and leader, it is important for you to sit down with your PE to map out goals that meet his/her professional objectives as well as the needs of the practice as a whole. Once you and your PE agree on a set of goals, be sure to establish a timeline for monitoring his/her progress to see if your PE is reaching these goals and to offer suggestions.

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Frequent communication also is important when mentoring a new PE. Always keep the lines of communication open and be sure that your PE feels comfortable approaching you to ask questions and discuss problems or concerns. Stay involved throughout your PE's training period, offering suggestions for improvement and providing assistance when needed. Make your PE feel valuable by including him/her in conversations around the office and seeking his/her opinion when appropriate.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that your new PE needs your support. As a mentor, always maintain a positive attitude and continually work toward reaching the goals that you established at the start of the training period. Remember to recognize and acknowledge your PE's success; simply saying "good job" often goes a long way.

Lead by Example

As the leader of the practice, the supervising physician should demonstrate the same professional behavior that he/she expects from a new PE and from the staff in general with regards to internal communication with employees as well as interaction with patients and pharmaceutical representatives. The role you play will help determine if your PE is successful.

Questions that a supervising physician should ask himself/herself include the following: Do I follow the policies and procedures that I set for my employees and provide the exceptional customer service that I expect from the rest of the staff? Do I treat all of my patients with the utmost importance and respect? Do I treat my employees with the same respect that I expect from them? These questions might seem elementary and obvious, but to ensure that the PE becomes an effective leader and provider, you must lead by example.

According to the old school theory, if you preach it, you had better believe it. You should hold your PE to the same high standards that you set for yourself. Explain that he/she is required to deliver the highest level of service and patient care, treat other employees respectfully and as equals, and follow all of the practice's policies. If you notice that your PE is not developing as a leader, reevaluate your training techniques. Are you spending enough time training the PE? Are you focusing too much on medical concerns and forgetting about his/her personal growth? Does the PE need to spend more time shadowing you? Is he/she surrounded by effective leaders and role models? Remember, coaching never stops; always offer guidance and leadership until your PE begins to emulate your example.

Provide Continuing Education Opportunities

In any specialized position, the more you learn about your discipline, the more successful you become. There are several ways to ensure that your PE continues to learn. In addition to attending local continuing education seminars and meetings, PEs should be offered learning opportunities within the practice. For instance, have one-on-one meetings with your PE; at the end of the meeting, provide a reading assignment or project for your PE to complete. You might also host a monthly journal club among your staff, allowing providers to present interesting cases and their outcomes while also reviewing journal articles. You can also ask the PE to conduct presentations on a specific diagnosis or treatment technique at monthly staff meetings. The supervising physician also should conduct chart reviews to ensure that the PE is utilizing proper documentation coding and medical treatment techniques that meet the requirements of the practice.

Create a Quality Assurance Plan

A quality assurance plan describes the process for training, supervising, and reviewing the performance of PEs within the practice. It is designed to provide comprehensive training for new PEs, increase the level of interaction between the supervising physician and the PE, and maximize the quality of care that is offered to patients. The following guidelines serve as a model for a quality assurance plan.

Guidelines

Physician Review—The supervising physician should review the PE's charts daily to ensure that each patient's medical history has been reviewed; physical examinations are thorough, include proper descriptions, and fit the diagnosis; and missing information has been added to the charts as necessary. The supervising physician should review the PE's charts to assess the appropriateness of the diagnoses and evaluate the suitability of the proposed treatment plan based on the medical history and physical examination documented in the patient's chart.

Feedback to the PE—The supervising physician must provide feedback to the PE concerning appropriateness of treatment decisions. If the PE does not have prescriptive privileges, the treatment plan must be reviewed with the supervising physician at the time of the office visit and the supervising physician will determine if the treatment plan is appropriate. If the PE has completed the requirements of the state medical board and is legally certified to prescribe medication, the supervising

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physician will review the PE's prescriptive decisions during chart evaluations.

Complex Cases—The supervising physician and the PE will review complex cases in one-on-one educational meetings or during the practice's monthly journal club meetings.

New Developments—The supervising physician and the PE will meet to discuss new medical developments and new pharmaceuticals that are relevant to the practice in weekly one-on-one meetings, after national or local dermatology meetings, or as the medical directors deem necessary. The PE will attend monthly dermatology journal reviews, state dermatology meetings, at least 1 annual national dermatology PE meeting, and other local dermatology meetings at the discretion of the medical director.

Summary

After your PE completes his/her training period, opportunities to coach, train, and educate should not end. The role you take will determine the success of your PE within your practice.

Reference

1. Habif TP. *Clinical Dermatology: A Color Guide to Diagnosis and Therapy*. 5th ed. New York, NY: Mosby; 2010. ■

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