

## MANAGING YOUR DERMATOLOGY PRACTICE

# Making Learning Fun

Staying abreast of new information just might be the greatest challenge in medicine today. All of us suffer from information overload, a phenomenon of relatively recent onset that can only get worse.

Five hundred years ago, Leonardo da Vinci could be an artist, an engineer, a musician, a scientist, and an inventor. One hundred years ago, a physician could actually aspire to know virtually all there was to know about medicine at the time.

Today, with a body of medical knowledge that is estimated to double every 3-5 years, keeping current is an exercise in futility. Furthermore, as our medical knowledge increases in depth, we are forced to surrender its width—with the perennial fear that we eventually will end up, as the old joke goes, knowing everything about nothing.

This is the age of information, but it is also the age of cyberspace, and the Internet was supposed to help us solve our information problem. Computers, we

were promised, would give us paperless offices, instant continuing medical education, and a venue for gathering new information as it became available and organizing it efficiently.

Some progress has been made. All of the major dermatology print journals are now available online. But the Internet promised us so much more.

Wouldn't it be great if there were a real-time online forum, devoted exclusively to dermatology, where new therapies, fascinating and rare cases, and controversial ideas could be exchanged with other dermatologists from around the world? One where you could get virtually instantaneous answers to pressing medical questions and share hard-to-find information at the speed of light?

As a matter of fact, there is. RxDerm-L, the brainchild of Dr. Arthur C. Huntley, is a medical forum that does all of that and more. And it's free. I joined several years ago, and I'm not sure how I ever got along without it.

An e-mail list open only to dermatolo-

gists, RxDerm-L currently has about 1,500 members from all over the world. We have residents eager to share the latest data, retired practitioners with decades of priceless experience, and everybody in between.

Think of it as the "Schoch Letter" on amphetamines.

Every day, I have the ability to discuss issues of importance to our specialty with excellent clinicians in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America, Europe, India, Australia, New Zealand, and the Middle East. They look at my interesting cases (via digital photos), and I look at theirs. They suggest treatment options I've never heard of, or have forgotten about. They offer their opinions on every medical subject imaginable and I offer mine, and we rant and debate and, in general, have a great time. Continuing education was never so much fun.

When I have a baffling case, I present it on RxDerm-L. Within hours I've accumulated a world class clinical symposium with plenty of ideas for therapy.

When I need clinical photos for a presentation, at least one list member has them, or knows where I can get

them. If I'm writing a new patient information handout or a consent form, list members will share ideas with me and critique the result.

We discuss new ideas, concepts, and treatments long before they become generally known. Biologic therapies, topical calcineurin inhibitors, cyclosporine and related compounds, filler substances and botulinum toxin, the sentinel lymph node controversy, lasers, blue lights—all of these topics (and countless others) were discussed extensively on RxDerm-L long before they became mainstream.

There is no charge to join either forum—all you need is a computer and Internet access. Both RxDerm-L and DermChat are open only to dermatologists and dermatology residents, so if you are not a member of the American Academy of Dermatology, you will have to furnish some other form of proof that you are a dermatologist. ■

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BY JOSEPH S. EASTERN, M.D.

## Keep Employees, Patients Happy to Ensure a Healthy Practice

BY MIRIAM E. TUCKER

Hire great employees. Train and treat them well. Give a lot of positive reinforcement.

Those were three pieces of advice offered by Dr. Suzanne L. Kilmer at a cosmetic dermatology seminar sponsored by Skin Disease Education Foundation (SDEF).

Allowing your employees autonomy and letting them rise to the occasion while providing a comfortable environment in a state-of-



your philosophy in mind," Dr. Kilmer said in an interview. Be sure to hire positive team players. "It's better to have a smart, happy, trainable employee than a trained, unhappy, slow-to-learn, or set-in-their-ways person," she said.

Use of a 3-month probation period for all new hires allows time to make sure

that the right people have been chosen and that they fit in with other employees.

All employees should be given thorough initial training that matches their job description.

Follow that with ongoing updates and in-service training for all levels of employees. Continuing medical education training should be encouraged and supported by management. Hold monthly staff meetings to help employees keep up to date on what is happening in the practice. And when you attend a meeting, be sure to relay any pertinent information to all employees to offer a true sense of transparency.

A positive attitude is key. In addition to hiring people with positive attitudes, always remember to have a positive attitude yourself during interactions with staff.

Negative personal issues should not be brought into the office. Nonetheless, any employee problems—personal or work-related—should be handled with

respect, being sensitive to personal needs. To keep the staff positive, be careful not to over-work or over-schedule them.

Your facility should reflect your high-expectation philosophy. All necessary tools to best facilitate practice needs should be available, including high-quality devices, tables, instruments, and equipment. Keep all waiting room and treatment areas clean and comfortable.

If possible, provide a separate check-out station with products, payment for procedures, and scheduling for future appointments.

Obtaining accreditation as a certified ambulatory surgery center (such as that offered by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, [www.aaahc.org](http://www.aaahc.org)),

can help ensure quality and raise the bar.

Do everything you can to ensure your patients' happiness. Happy patients are:

- ▶ Greeted warmly on arrival;
- ▶ Escorted courteously to the room;
- ▶ Well educated about their treatments via pamphlets, DVDs, Web site information, and direct communication with staff;
- ▶ Successfully treated with minimal side effects; and
- ▶ Provided with satisfaction surveys to complete.

Dr. Kilmer's overriding approach comes from a department store: "Keep in mind the Nordstrom's philosophy of exceeding expectations."

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