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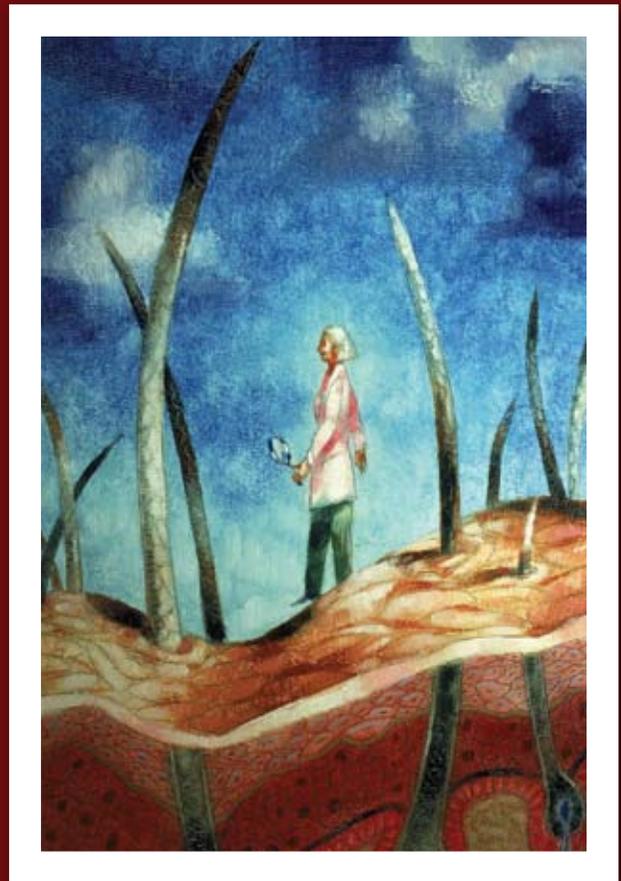
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Workplace Excellence

Creating an Intentional Culture of Excellence in the Workplace

By Matthew Davidson, Ph.D.

In my work as President of the Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE) I have had the opportunity to work with diverse individuals and organizations in their quest to achieve excellence. This column dedicated to Workplace Excellence will explore the organizational, interpersonal, and ethical issues that contribute to (or detract from) individual or organizational excellence within the physician assistant profession. If you have any workplace topics you would like to see covered in the JDPA please feel free to share them with us. Email editor@jdpa.org with any topic ideas or questions concerning the workplace.

Greetings! It is my great pleasure to contribute this inaugural article as part of the new Workplace Excellence column of the JDPA. A journal dedicated to excellence in dermatological patient care through the PA profession must clearly address the science of disease and treatment. And yet that in itself is insufficient for excellence in dermatological patient care when you consider that PAs carry out their craft with and for human beings nested in a very complex human ecology. In fact, my experience suggests that it is often our failures and inadequacies as human beings and human organizations, more so even than deficiencies in medical knowledge, that detracts from excellence in patient care.

This Workplace Excellence column will be used as a forum to draw out critical issues within the human ecology of dermatological patient care including PA-patient relationships, PA-supervising physician (and staff) relationships, as well as the PA relationship to self. I will present theoretical, empirical, and practical insights on how each of these layers in the ecology of patient care can contribute to or detract from patient care. For example, this column will discuss the PA's ability to communicate effectively, to give and receive feedback, to balance competing priorities and stakeholder needs, to maintain passion and motivation for work while also achieving life-balance, and to be an effective member of a professional and ethical community.

In the busy, bottom-line world in which we live and work, individuals and organizations too often focus on the "urgent over the important." We become adept at looking at details without ever seeing the larger picture. We forge ahead with our work with little time to ask ourselves the all-important question: "How's that working for you?" and for us and for the

patients we serve? PAs need to see the larger picture of the culture and competencies needed to enhance their ability to do the following:

- Develop positive and productive relationships
- Communicate and collaborate with efficiency and effectiveness
- Manage priorities and reduce stress
- Commit to high standards and continuous improvement
- Demonstrate emotional intelligence, integrity, and responsibility
- Exhibit creativity and innovation as well as critical thinking and problem solving
- Lead and serve others
- Live a balanced, purposeful, and healthy life

Aristotle famously observed, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." This statement is true for the individual and for the organization. Random acts of excellence or pockets of excellence can be achieved by any individual or organization. But consistent excellent patient care that is experienced as a stable norm or as a distinguishing mark of your practice will come only as the result of an intentional culture where excellence is repeatedly, consistently, and pervasively practiced.

This is why our organizational culture - that is, our shared values, beliefs, and operational norms - must be intentional. We cannot leave any aspect of the work experience too unstructured or allow for unintentional norms, norms that simply emerge. Unintentional culture can be described as a "it's just a..." mindset; it's just a staff meeting, it's just an acne follow-up, it's just an appointment reminder. We must know what we do and why we do it. For it is



The Difference We Make Facing Our Mistakes

By Brian T. Maurer, PA-C

Nowadays, the popular press focuses on medical errors from the perspective of the patient. Pick up any current patient-focused periodical, and you're apt to find a Doctor So-and-so did me wrong article. Many times the patient has a valid gripe.

In his recent TED talk Doctors make mistakes: Can we talk about that? (www.ted.com/talks/brian_goldman_doctors_make_mistakes_can_we_talk_about_that.html), Canadian physician Brian Goldman offers a viewpoint from the opposite camp: How do clinicians react when confronted with the oft-times detrimental effects of errors in clinical judgement?

We know that Sir William Osler made at least one attempt to address this issue head on when he called his residents to the morgue to witness his error in diagnosis.

"Once in a ward class there was a big colored man whom he demonstrated as showing all the classical symptoms of croupous pneumonia. The man came to autopsy later. He had no pneumonia, but a chest full of fluid. Dr. Osler seemed delighted, sent especially for all those in his ward class, showed them what a mistake he had made, how it might have been

avoided and how careful they should be not to repeat it. In 30 years of practice since then... I remember that case."

Over the course of my career I've tried to get at such issues by writing about them. I recall one of my early pieces published in the premier issue of *Dermanities*, titled Abdominal Pain. Although revisiting it still leaves me feeling a bit queasy, it offers a lesson that I shall never forget. Or in Doctor Goldman's words, "Yes, I remember..."

Facing our mistakes is one of the most effective tools that we clinicians have to improve our clinical diagnostic acumen. What a pity that more of us don't take advantage of it. 🗨️

Brian T. Maurer has practiced pediatric medicine as a physician assistant for thirty years. Over the past two decades Mr. Maurer has explored the illness narrative as a tool to cultivate an appreciation for the delivery of humane medical care. He has published numerous vignettes, editorials, and essays in both national and international journals. Mr. Maurer has been a contributing author to the online open-access journal *Dermanities* (www.dermanities.com) since its inception. Readers can visit the author on the web at <http://briantmaurer.wordpress.com>.

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through our words and actions that we communicate to all those we serve and interact with that, "This is who we are. These are our values."

We must continue to audit our practices to determine which are supportive of and which diminish our mission of excellent patient care. When it comes to achieving excellence, regardless of your field of work, there are simply no universally benign practices; all have the potential to turn into an organizational malignancy. What do we do? Why do we do it that way? Are we intentional? Does this routine, practice, protocol, or ritual contribute to excellent patient care? Is there a better way to interact with patients and colleagues? How can I become an excellent PA serving my patients, my practice, and myself with integrity? Stay tuned to future Workplace Excellence columns for further insights on these pressing questions. 🗨️



Matthew L. Davidson, Ph.D. is the Founder, President, and Director of Education for the Institute for Excellence & Ethics (IEE), a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation dedicated to helping individuals and organizations achieve excellence. Previously he was the Research Director at the Center for Respect & Responsibility at the State University of New York College at Cortland. He has been on staff at the Family Life Development Center at Cornell University, the Values Program at LeMoyne College, and the Mendelson Center for Sport, Character, and Culture at the University of Notre Dame where he was also an Adjunct Professor of Education. He is a National Spokesperson for the Business Bureau National Center for Character Ethics. The IEE specializes in the development and dissemination of research-based tools for developing the culture and competencies of excellence and ethics in schools, athletics, the workplace, and the home; this is done through professional development workshops & academies, teaching & learning resources, assessment, and consulting services. He is a frequent national presenter and is available for keynote lectures, professional development, retreats, and organizational consulting. For additional information or to contact the IEE, please visit www.excellenceandethics.org.