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INSIDE »

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Enhance Staff Education and Training

Consider these strategies **BY ROBERT KURTZ**

KEY LEARNINGS

- Keep team members current on evidence-based practices and requirements
- Make learning fun by using creative methods

As ASCs work to optimize their surgical schedules, safely maximize case volume and minimize staff downtime, they must ensure staff education and training are both effective and efficient, says Allison Stock, RN, CASC, CAIP, chief operations officer for Surgical Management Professionals in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

“*You have to know your staff, know what moves them, and get them involved so education and training become a continuous process.”*

—Allison Stock, RN, CASC, CAIP
Surgical Management Professionals

“Your education and training need to be highly focused to deliver the results you are looking for,” Stock says. “It is about being creative and finding ways to make it a little catchier or more nuanced—something that grabs

attention, stands out and helps staff stay engaged and retain the information.”

Says Nancy Aragon, RN, director of nursing at Murrieta Valley Surgery Center in Wildomar, California, “It is more important than ever to be on the same page, knowing evidence-based practices and requirements can change at any moment,” she says. “Providing excellent patient care is always our priority, and staying current and informed helps us continue to excel.”

Stepping Up Your Efforts

To keep staff education and training feeling fresh, Katie Olmsted, RN, clinical director of Tower Clock Surgery Center in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Tower Clock Surgery Center Appleton in Appleton, Wisconsin, says her ASCs use a variety of teaching formats. “Switching up your modes of learning helps keep staff from becoming lax or complacent,” she says.

While much of her ASCs’ education is delivered through an online learning system, Olmsted is intentional about tailoring its content. “I take advantage of the ability to create bundles,” she says. “Depending on someone’s department, I can assign role-specific education without spending a lot of time searching. One of my lead registered nurses helps review the materials to make sure nothing is missed and everything stays current.”

Murrieta Valley Surgery Center also benefits from bringing in outside expertise for staff training. The local sheriff’s department provided instruction for the center’s annual active shooter training, and the fire department led hands-on fire extinguisher training. “When we have reached out to our community for help, they have always been happy to support us,” Aragon says.

Changing who delivers education and training can bring fresh energy to routine topics, Stock says. She encourages ASCs to invite staff to lead discussions on subjects they are passion-

Infection Prevention Training Tips

Put your people in a position to succeed. Whoever is responsible for infection prevention training and oversight must have the resources to do the job well, says Allison Stock, RN, CASC, CAIP, chief operations officer for Surgical Management Professionals in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

"If you assign people to these roles but do not give them time to get educated and dive into the position, they will struggle to succeed," she says. "Let them attend conferences, participate in webinars and take courses. Then allow them the time to absorb what they have learned." She also encourages supporting staff in pursuing the Certified Ambulatory Infection Preventionist (CAIP) certification, noting that the process of earning and maintaining it helps keep them current on best practices and requirements.

Build a team. Instead of placing the full burden of infection prevention on a single staff member, consider assembling a team, recommends Katie Olmsted, RN, clinical director of Tower Clock Surgery Center in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and Tower Clock Surgery Center Appleton in Appleton, Wisconsin. Four of Olmsted's nurses have completed an online infection prevention course through the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses.

"This team supports our staff and each other, and having a bigger team takes pressure off of me and my administrator," Olmsted says. "We can rely more on multiple staff members who are in the field."



Call on your vendor reps. Nancy Aragon, RN, director of nursing for Murrieta Valley Surgery Center in Wildomar, California, does not hesitate to engage her ASC's vendors to provide staff training that supports infection prevention. For example, a vendor for preoperative skin preparation products sent a representative to conduct an on-site demonstration of the proper usage of its products.

"I like to utilize my reps a lot," Aragon says. "I have them come in to provide an in-service, then have them stay for at least two cases to observe and ensure we are using the product correctly."

Turn findings into action. Sharing surveillance results with staff is key, Stock says. "Whether you are seeing infections or not, your staff needs to understand what you are tracking and why," she says. "That information is reported to an ASC's governing board, but it also belongs in staff meetings, so everyone stays informed."

When reeducation is needed on topics like hand hygiene or sterile processing, Stock emphasizes the importance of explaining what prompted it. "This is not about shaming someone. It is about keeping everyone in the loop so the entire center can improve together," she says.

Strengthen postoperative support. At Murrieta Valley Surgery Center, an infection control nurse ensures that patients receive clear discharge instructions on recognizing signs of infection and what to do if symptoms arise. The center recently updated its protocol to streamline communication after surgery. "Patients now contact a registered nurse directly through a dedicated cell line if they have questions or concerns," Aragon says. "That allows us to respond immediately and quickly determine whether the patient needs to return for further care."

ate about. "Doing so gets staff involved and helps others better understand the 'why' behind what we do," she says. "It is not just about meeting regulatory requirements. It is about safety and shared understanding." Assigning staff this responsibility is also an effective way to identify and develop potential

leaders by giving them a chance to step up without committing to a full leadership role, Stock adds.

At Murrieta Valley Surgery Center, every clinical staff member is responsible for leading a monthly in-service session. They research a topic, present it during the monthly

staff meeting and guide a hands-on training that follows. "This has been a great way to involve the team and build accountability into our education and training," Aragon says.

Aragon has worked to expand her access to external resources that strengthen staff education and train-



ing. She is an active member of the *ASCA Connect* discussion board, both reading posts for insight and contributing to conversations. “I will not hesitate to reach out and ask the community how they are approaching topics like CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation] and code blue training or new requirements.”

Aragon also uses materials from organizations such as the Malignant Hyperthermia Association of the United States (MHAUS) and the California State Board of Pharmacy. “I keep all of the most current information I gather in the education binder I use throughout the year,” she adds.

When Tower Clock Surgery Center Appleton opened in 2024, the surgery center’s leadership team onboarded about 20 new employees. With a much

larger staff across both locations, Olmsted and her team put extra effort into making their annual “education day” more engaging.

“This year, the staff created a scavenger hunt with all kinds of tasks to complete around the building, like finding a specific policy on the computer and printing it, or locating the gas shutoff, spill kit or PPE [personal protective equipment],” Olmsted says. “We placed small clips at each location, and everyone raced around collecting the clips. That fun element helped reinforce where key items can be found.”

Giving staff opportunities to interact and take ownership during training can leave a lasting impact, Stock says. She has seen ASCs succeed with “skills labs” that function like hands-

on workshops or training stations. Set up over a few days or weeks in a room within the ASC, these labs allow staff to validate skills like checking blood glucose or cleaning a scope at their own pace, with posters or pamphlets for reference and real-time demonstrations for validation.

“It puts staff in the driver’s seat,” Stock says. “If they are confident in one area, they can move on. If they need more time or have questions, they can dig deeper. A skills lab also helps identify specific needs, so staff can focus on where they need to spend more time and receive extra handholding.”

Build Through Engagement

Effective staff education and training requires more than just delivering information, Stock says. “You have to know your staff, know what moves them and get them involved so education and training become a continuous process.” That may mean using online learning systems to address time and resource constraints, paired with in-person interaction to ensure employees understand the material, receive the support they need and build competency, she says.

Olmsted has found that when staff members feel confident and valued, they are more likely to apply what they have learned effectively. To reinforce that mindset, leaders at her ASCs have started recognizing team members who go above and beyond or handle challenging situations well. Staff members receive a small token of appreciation along with a handwritten note from the leader acknowledging their efforts. “That has really gone a long way,” she says. “Even just that little bit of recognition helps people stay invested. You can feel the difference.” <<