

Presented by the  
American Society of  
Cosmetic Dermatology  
& Aesthetic Surgery

# Physician Extenders: What They Can Do for Your Practice and How to Hire the Right One

Helen M. Torok, MD; Heather L. Funk, MBA; Aaron Funk

When exploring opportunities for growth within a medical practice, dermatologists typically consider new products, treatments, and technologies to enhance the services that they offer; however, it also is important to consider the addition of a physician extender (PE) as both a complement to the staff and an additional resource for patients. A PE can be a valuable asset to both the individual physician and the practice as a whole, and can contribute to increased profitability and patient satisfaction. The benefits of hiring a PE are highlighted in this article as well as tips for choosing the right PE for your practice.

## Benefits for the Supervising Physician

Having a PE on staff provides a multitude of benefits for the supervising physician, primarily in productivity. Reviewing lab work and pathology reports, making telephone calls, and processing insurance forms are time-consuming tasks that can keep a physician from his/her patients. Physicians who can delegate administrative responsibilities to a PE can handle more appointments and have more time to spend with each patient, thereby promoting appointment efficiency and cutting down on wait time. Physician extenders also can oversee routine follow-ups, giving the supervising physician freedom to focus on the more acute and complicated cases. Ultimately, with a PE to share the workload, the supervising physician can manage more patients, thus facilitating an increase in overall revenue.

---

All from Trillium Creek Dermatology and Aesthetic Center, Medina, Ohio. Dr. Torok also is from Northeastern Ohio University College of Medicine, Rootstown.

The authors report no conflicts of interest in relation to this article.  
Correspondence: Helen Torok, MD, Trillium Creek Dermatology, 5783 Wooster Pike, Medina, OH 44256.

## Benefits for the Practice

Patient satisfaction is the key to a successful practice. Physician extenders can ensure that patients continue to receive the personal attention they deserve, ultimately providing the high level of care that is expected of your practice. Practices that employ a PE also are poised to offer more cosmetic services to a greater number of patients; for example, chemical peels, fillers, some laser treatments, cancer screenings, and other standard procedures can be exclusively administered by the PE, relieving the physician of any additional overload to his/her appointment schedule. Even for the general dermatologist who might be limited in the number of aesthetic procedures he/she has the time and ability to perform, the addition of a PE provides an extra set of hands, enabling the practice to render a more extensive variety of cosmetic treatments.

Physician extenders also can act as ambassadors for a practice, conducting skin cancer screenings for the general public, which will attract a larger clientele and promote awareness of the cosmetic services that the practice has to offer. They also can reach out to other providers and direct recruitment efforts to build relationships with affiliates and potential additions to the staff. In many ways, the PE can work on behalf of a practice to enhance its overall efficiency and ensure the highest quality of patient care.

## Profitability

New patients are essential to the financial growth of any dermatology practice; in most cases, expansion requires additional manpower. By adding a PE to its staff, a practice that usually sees 10 to 20 new patients and 20 to 40 follow-ups per day could potentially take on as many as 20 to 30 new patients and 30 to 50 follow-ups per day. In addition to handling more appointments within

## PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

the practice, a PE also can serve as a valuable resource for new marketing ideas and strategies that will attract a larger clientele. The prospect of more patients who have a positive experience with the PE also increases the likelihood for referrals. Overall, a practice with a PE can substantially improve its bottom line as a result of the higher volume of patients it can manage. It also is a cost-effective way to expand the practice and take on more patients without the expense of adding another physician to the payroll.

### Recruiting a PE

Although an important step, making the decision to hire a PE is only half the battle. Finding one that is a good fit for your staff can be a grueling process, but there are several reliable ways to find qualified candidates. The simplest method, perhaps, is to post the job opening on your practice's Web site. To reach more potential candidates, extend news of your search to larger organizations such as the American Academy of Physician Assistants or the American Academy of Dermatology and post ads on their sites. You also can network with other providers in the area for recommendations of potential candidates; also, your pharmaceutical representatives might know a PE who is looking to relocate or switch positions. Ultimately, getting the word out that you are looking for a PE is the most important way to start your search.

Another method of screening potential candidates is to bring PE students into your office for shadowing opportunities. Contact local schools and institutions that train physician assistants and nurse practitioners to arrange a rotation schedule for your practice. These same schools also may be willing to post the opening on their Web sites. Working alongside potential candidates in your regular office environment will help determine who might be a good fit for the job. In turn, students also can recommend peers who might be interested in the position. If you opt to work with PE students, keep

in mind that a physician from your staff must be willing to complete the required paperwork to establish the rotation schedule and serve as a teacher/mentor.

### Hiring the Right PE

Hiring the right PE is vital; hiring the wrong one can be costly in the end, both to the practice and the patients. The time and expense that go into advertising the position, observing candidates, and training new hires are too substantial to waste on a process that is based on trial and error without an informed decision.

Before making your decision, observe the candidate in the context of your practice. Have him/her shadow multiple staff members to ensure that he/she will work well with everyone in the practice. The more opinions you have to consider, the more informed you will be in making your decision.

There are several important personality characteristics to consider while he/she is shadowing: (1) character—will the candidate complement your staff and interact well with patients? (2) appearance—does the candidate maintain a professional image that matches the standards of your practice? (3) communication skills—how well will the candidate communicate with patients and staff members? (4) motivation—is the candidate proactive and driven to succeed? (5) investment—does the candidate demonstrate a genuine interest in joining your team? (6) maturity level—is the candidate a positive reflection of your more experienced staff?

Most importantly, meet one-on-one with the PE candidate once he/she has completed the shadowing period to answer any additional questions that he/she may have gathered from observing the practice.

### Summary

The right PE will help your practice grow, keep your patients satisfied, and be a valuable asset for years to come. ■