

It takes a village: Leading a wound team

By Jennifer Oakley, BS, RN, WCC, DWC, OMS

I used to think I could do it alone. I took the wound care certification course, passed the certification exam, and took all of my new knowledge—and my new WCC credential—back to the long-term care facility where I worked. I was ready to change the world.

It didn't take me long to figure out that I couldn't change the complex world of wound care alone. I needed a team of specialists who could manage my patient's troubles with nutrition, swallowing, activities of daily living, positioning, body image issues, and many other areas that required expertise I didn't have.

A team consists of a group of people who are working together toward a common goal. A team has members whose skills complement each other. A successful team maximizes individuals' strengths and establishes a strong sense of mutual commitment. That success begins with effective leaders. Here are tips that will help you become one of those effective leaders.

Recruit the right players for your team

As wound care clinicians, we must always treat the *whole* patient, not just the *hole* in the patient. Treating the patient holistically requires input from everyone on the healthcare team or, in essence, the “village.” At a minimum, your village should include a certified wound care clinician,



physical therapist, occupational therapist, dietician, nurse manager, nurse aide, social worker, speech language pathologist, minimum data set coordinator or utilization review specialist, the director of nursing for the facility, the patient's prescriber and, of course, the patient.

Understand leadership characteristics

Good leaders believe in themselves and are “authentic.” Authentic leaders understand themselves and their strengths and weaknesses. They are honest, act with integrity, and can articulate the vision or goal of the team to its members. Effective leaders embrace the future and let go of the past; they understand that change is an essential part of health care today. Leaders see possibilities, not just prob-

TAKE ACTION: Take a quiz to see how authentic a leader you are.

lems, and are able to communicate clearly.

Leaders depend on the goodwill of their team to get things done (rather than authority from the top down), use the word “We” instead of “I,” ask for action, and say, “Let’s go do this together.” Leaders use their influence, supported by evidence-based practice, to change minds, shape opinions, and move others to act.

Whether you focus on preventing pressure ulcers, developing product formulas, or implementing ankle-brachial index testing, you’ll find that combining a positive attitude with best practices and being authentic will help you lead the team in achieving its goals.

Keep the team motivated

Keeping your team motivated can be difficult. How do you inspire people every day? Most facilities don’t have the budget for raises or bonuses; in reality, other ways are more effective for helping your team keep their workplace passion.

Here are some ideas to get you started. Offer positive praise for a job well done, say “thank you,” give awards and certificates, catch members “doing the right thing” and post their pictures on bulletin boards, celebrate success with parties, or host a break-time brunch or pizza party lunch. The goal is to foster an environment that rewards positivity rather than one that focuses on negativity.

Remember that knowledge is power, so if you educate your team, amazing things will happen. Members will be able not only to identify when there is a problem but also solve that problem on their own without intervention from management, creating pride in a job well done.

We are social creatures, so get out from behind your desk and be “present” on the unit or in the clinic. Team members appreciate a leader who is visible and willing to answer questions.

Take time to get to know your staff and team members on a personal level, too. What we do for a living is much

Remember that knowledge is power, so if you educate your team, amazing things will happen.

more than just a job for most of us. If you ask me to tell you about myself, I would start by saying, “I’m a wound care nurse”; many of us associate a large part of our identity with our careers. When you help your staff find camaraderie in teamwork and pride in the job they do, it’s a win-win for all involved and promotes successful outcomes.

Plan how to manage conflict

As the leader, you will have to interact with all types of personalities on your team and maximize their strengths while minimizing their weakness. Keep in mind

(continued on page 35)

Lymphedema Treatment Act

The Lymphedema Treatment Act (HR 3877) is intended to improve coverage for the treatment of lymphedema from any cause. You can visit the Act's [website](#) to learn how to contact your members of Congress about the Act and join your state's advocacy team. Consider these six easy ways to increase awareness:

- Distribute information cards.
- Distribute or post fact sheets.
- Like the Act's Facebook page.
- Follow the act on Twitter and re-tweet tweets.
- Include information on your website or blog.
- Use a tell-a-friend form to quickly tell up to 10 people at a time about the website.



You can also access an [update](#) on the Act on the National Lymphedema Network's website. ■

(continued from page 15)

that few teams run smoothly all the time. Challenges the team might encounter include a lack of trust among members, passivity, lack of commitment or accountability, members who make excuses or cling to the past, negative attitudes, fear of conflict, and actual conflict.

You will need to address potential and actual conflicts to ensure the team's success. Two strategies are *compromising*, where each party gives in a little bit to meet in the middle, and *collaborating*, where each party works together to come up with a solution. These methods foster teamwork and better working relationships.

Whichever strategy you use, be sure you have all the facts, that everyone's emotions are in check, and that the timing is appropriate for discussing the con-

flict. Use effective communication, make eye contact, be sure your body language is "open," use "I feel" statements and open-ended questions, and thank each party when finished. Addressing—and solving—problems quickly will put your team back on track to the real problem at hand: healing those wounds!

Reap the benefits

An effective team leader chooses the right team members, understands leadership characteristics, encourages and motivates each team member, and addresses conflicts appropriately. If you accomplish all this, your reward will likely be better patient outcomes and personal satisfaction from working with your village of professionals. ■

Jennifer Oakley is a clinical instructor for the [Wound Care Education Institute](#) in Plainfield, Ill.