

## Medical staff training for your private practice with Geoff Kass

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AMA Update covers a range of health care topics affecting the lives of physicians, residents, medical students and patients. From private practice and health system leaders to scientists and public health officials, hear from the experts in medicine on COVID-19, medical education, advocacy issues, burnout, vaccines and more.

### Featured topic and speakers

Training clinical staff plays a major role in a private practice's success. Geoff Kass, director of Medline University, joins us to discuss how private practices can make their training more effective and ensure their staff is always up to date. AMA Chief Experience Officer Todd Unger hosts.

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### Speaker

- Geoff Kass, director, Medline University

### Transcript

**Unger:** Hello and welcome to the AMA Update video and podcast series. Today we're talking about training for clinical staff, specifically the challenges and opportunities facing private practices in keeping their staff skills up to date. I'm joined by Geoff Kass, director of Medline University at Medline Industries in Northfield, Illinois. Medline is a preferred provider through our AMA Member Benefits PLUS program.

I'm Todd Unger, AMA's chief experience officer in Chicago. Geoff, we're glad to have you today.

**Kass:** Well, thanks for having me. I appreciate it.

**Unger:** Training is a fundamental part of medicine, obviously, and whether it's reading the latest research or earning CME, physicians are constantly learning. Something we talk about less often, though, is the clinical staff who support physicians. They also have to stay up to date as medicine evolves. Geoff, what does their training typically look like?

**Kass:** Well, typically, most practices have some sort of onboarding training for their new staff. It's their reinforcement or annual training that sort of varies by practice, but generally speaking, both types of training—you'll see courses like HIPAA training, bloodborne pathogen, PPE, communication and cultural awareness, maybe fire safety, patient handling, things like that.

The COVID health pandemic caused a lot of disruptions, less time, more things to do. And often, that new staff lacks proper onboarding education and current staff hasn't participated in that reinforcement training in quite a long time. So a lot of practices are looking for ways to get back into good routines of standardized education and training.

**Unger:** And it can be a lot to manage all that training, especially for private practices. Talk to us a little bit about some of the unique challenges that they face in keeping their staff up to date, especially given what you just talked about.

**Kass:** Sure, absolutely. So there's a couple of key challenges that we're looking at here. The first thing is access to currently updated, clinically sound educational resources and courses, finding that content in the first place. It takes time, clock hours to kind of source that all out, vet it, make sure it's the quality you need for your practice.

A second major challenge is budget. A lot of practices don't have big budgets for training and education, unlike some of their acute partners. The big hospitals often have much larger budgets than smaller practices might.

Another challenge is, frankly, standardized practices such as annual training sometimes aren't mandated. So it doesn't exist, or even if it does exist, it exists poorly.

And then finally, what happens very often is a lot of staff members seek out their own training. So it becomes a lot more work and it's a lot more stress for them. And it impacts their effectiveness. Not only is it hard to kind of manage and track all those different sources, keeping an eye on that history and the record keeping if you're pursuing it across different sources can be a real challenge for them to pass it along to their supervisors or staff at their facility.

**Unger:** Well, given those challenges, it's not surprising that a lot of practices are turning to digital tools and digital programs to make their training more efficient, more effective. When a practice is evaluating a new training tool like that, do you have some advice on what they should look for?

**Kass:** Yeah, absolutely. So when we talk about digital, I think we're agreeing that very specifically, it should be online. That tool, that system should be online. That's where staff can access it where and when it works best for them, wherever they have an internet connection.

That tool, that system—that should have a robust catalog of content. It should span all the critical needs, like those annual topics we talked a little bit about earlier, but it also should expand to topics that might be more elective in nature.

It should be easy to navigate. Learners should be able to find what they need very easily—robust keyword systems, great filters and categories. That content should be easy for the practice members to find.

Most importantly, the content should be engaging. It should be interactive. It should be fun. It should be a more enjoyable way to learn. That helps improve the retention of that information for the facility members.

And finally, it should have tools for the administrators. The administrators should be able to make course bundles and student groups, track the progress and run any reports that they may need for their own record keeping. Those are the important considerations when you're examining digital tools.

**Unger:** You mentioned content. Whether it's for new or existing staff, what are some of the hot emerging topics that practices should start including in their training right now?

**Kass:** Well, hot and emerging these days—so unfortunately, emergencies, emergency preparedness, violence in the workplace. Those are all very current topical subjects that most health care facilities are reviewing for their staff. The last couple of years have been tough.

So nursing burnout—courses and content on dealing with and navigating nursing burnout is an important topic to consider. Navigating the opioid epidemic that we've seen on the rise for the last couple of years—that's important conversations to have and important content for your staff to be reviewing and keeping up to date on. Cultural awareness, serving the needs of diverse populations, and frankly, anything with technology—telehealth, equipment, EMRs. Those may be of interest as well.

**Unger:** And especially as topics like that emerge and on the technology front, obviously, you have to keep learning. We talked about that before. How often should a practice be retraining their staff to keep them up to date and why is that so important?

**Kass:** They should consider doing it annually. A McKnight survey a couple of years back found that more training or learning opportunities was key to workplace satisfaction. So with that in mind, those annual courses like PPE and HIPAA and what have you that we talked about a little while ago—it's important for staff to stay updated on policies and changes in procedures.

So if they're participating in stuff annually, that increases their confidence. They're confident that they're more knowledgeable and understanding of what the latest best practices are. It improves the standard of care for their patients. So annually is really the answer there. Stay up on that stuff on at least a 12-month basis whether it's required or not.

**Unger:** I'm going to ask you a little bit more. You mention the term "professional satisfaction." We know we're in a real challenge right now post pandemic with burnout at an all-time high. Retention of staff—another huge issue, particularly for—really, for everyone out there. Talk to us a little bit about how does training itself have a big impact on that.

**Kass:** Well, it has an impact a couple of ways, I think. I think if you have a good formal education and training system in place where there's a routine that staff can come to expect, where there's that catalog I mentioned earlier that's nice and robust and engaging, I think it helps a couple of different ways. I think it helps with retaining staff because you're offering value to your staff that they might have to chase down elsewhere, which we talked a little bit about earlier as well.

I think it helps you manage through change because it's a point of consistency. Again, it's something they come to expect, and if the education is of high enough quality, it's something they may actually come to enjoy. Again, not only are they learning the latest practice, policy, and procedure, but they're learning in that engaging way. And they're meeting the needs not only of themselves but of their organization, right? I think those are kind of the key considerations for that.

**Unger:** Well, thanks so much, Geoff, for being here today and providing your perspective. That's it for today's episode.

I do want to mention, though, as part of the AMA's collaboration with Medline, AMA members have access to Medline University and a curated list of training courses to help them get started. For more information, check out the link that's in the description of this episode. We'll be back soon with another AMA Update. You can find all our videos and podcasts at [ama-assn.org/podcasts](https://ama-assn.org/podcasts). Thanks so much for joining us today and please take care.

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