**Kids’ “go-to-work day” problems**

Q Historically, our hospital has not participated in the community’s annual “Bring Your Child to Work Day,” but we are under increasing pressure to do so. Can we possibly manage without creating undue liability for the lab?

A While “Take Your Child (formerly Take Your Daughter) To Work Day” serves the happy purpose of teaching children the realities of the parental workday, low productivity can result since special activities are designed to keep the children interested and engaged. While the morale boost and family-friendly image the event provides may be worthwhile, the process may not translate well to the lab.

To secure the necessary permission, steps need to be taken a) to ensure children’s safety in the lab and b) to respect the privacy of patients whose samples are being tested. Look over the lab’s requirements for visitors and temporary workers; the preparation for a child in the lab will fall somewhere in between.

Visitors are generally required to remain in public areas of the lab and, if they do not, are required to be with a laboratory staff member at all times. They are not permitted access to testing areas and are not given the ability to see/read test reports. On a facilities tour, they are not allowed “hands-on” familiarity with equipment, and any discussion with them is kept general. Sometimes, visitors are required to wear a visible badge indicating their status and preventing them from wandering around unescorted.

Temporary workers usually have the same level of training in safety, privacy, and security as regular employees. Because their duties require intimate association with daily lab work, they must treat specimens, instruments, and information with the same respect and discretion as full-time lab employees. This requires either the proper preparatory agreements between institutions (such as business-associate agreements under HIPAA) or actual training in hospital policies and procedures as orientation.

Bringing children into the workplace adds the dimension of various ages and maturities. Both the senior in high school and the elementary-school child who have different interests and attention spans present real and unique opportunities for legal disaster in the lab. In either case, the individual(s) responsible for accompanying and educating the guests will be taken out of productive bench service that day.

Anyone present in the lab needs to be aware of specific safety precautions needed to prevent injury from exposure to workplace hazards — from chemicals to infectious agents. This means some education in what not to touch and why. Likewise, anyone in the lab must be aware of the need for privacy under HIPAA: sensitive information must be kept from those with no legitimate need to know. In a lab that is actively processing specimens, this can be an issue, given that labeled samples and worksheets abound. Access to the lab computer presents an obvious potential security breach in this day and age; because kids are so cyber-savvy, keep young visitors far away from lab computer systems.

Even bringing a visitor in to see phlebotomy can be risky; it requires patient permission first. What is “casual” to the laboratorian can be disconcerting to the visitor. Be prepared for one of your biggest and brawniest visitors to faint at the sight of blood.

Children need special permission from parents to participate in the workday, and most lawyers would also advise getting liability waivers. Some companies require parents to accompany their children, which can raise the question of whether doing so is legitimate work activity for the parent or whether parental participation requires taking leave.

For many reasons, some institutions gave up on having children involved in patient-care areas and, instead, have a basic-orientation day for hospital-based employment — a good way to familiarize kids with hospitals and the work they do without interfering in the daily work of caring for patients.

If there is both interest in and permission for doing a similar program just for the lab, start early by determining interest and the ages. Most facilities limit participation to students no younger than eight and prohibit students younger than 15 from sensitive areas, (e.g., those with workplace pathogens). Often, projects or demonstrations set aside from the actual workday and workplace can illustrate lab procedures. Consider a demo of bedside glucose testing to explain how tests are done, followed by a quick, from-a-distance tour of lab areas to explain that these big machines work very much like the hand-held ones.

When younger, most of us enjoyed running simple lab tests, but the days are over when you could safely use a student a) as the source of a specimen or b) to run a test because of the concern for liability. Tests such as these retain value in explaining the basis for testing and because they are visually striking (as opposed to numbers coming from a machine).

Check out the Web for ideas. The NIH [http://takeyourchildtowork.nih.gov/app/SchedEvents.aspx](http://takeyourchildtowork.nih.gov/app/SchedEvents.aspx) has a particularly good site, but you might also check out Caltech [http://pr.caltech.edu/periodicals/336/articles/Volume%205/04-21-05/children.html](http://pr.caltech.edu/periodicals/336/articles/Volume%205/04-21-05/children.html), or UC Berkeley [http://staff.berkeley.edu/info/tvc.html](http://staff.berkeley.edu/info/tvc.html) for ideas. Although “Take Your Child to Work” is common, it is, by no means, universal; a 2005 survey by the American Society of Employers found that 73% of respondents did not participate.

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