

Meet an Emergency Department Physician/PA Team

When Dr. Lawrence Schiff came to Eastern Long Island Hospital 10 years ago “no one had heard of physician assistants in the emergency room,” he says. “During my residency, I worked side by side with many PAs who taught me a lot. They had already done the procedures I was just learning, and I had respect for them. When I suggested bringing on PAs here, I had to write the policy to get them recognized and credentialed.”

Today, Dr. Schiff, Director, Emergency Department, works with Christopher Edelstein, PA-C, treating all acuity levels at this small community hospital.

Edelstein has been a PA for 13 years and has experience in a Level 1 trauma hospital, surgery, toxicology and orthopedics. “During the summer, we see a lot of boating injuries, Lyme disease, heat exhaustion and car accidents,” he says. “Year-round we deal with acute heart problems and chronic disease, which means managing patients with multiple issues and medications.”

Dr. Schiff says, “PAs benefit the patient and the physician. Patients are definitely seen sooner, because if I am busy with one patient, Christopher can step in to work up, diagnose, treat, and help get patients admitted if necessary. PAs help the physician by being able to do most things a doctor does. We discuss each case, and they provide another set of eyes and hands.”

Because PAs work with a supervising physician, it is important that their relationship be strong. “Christopher knows medicine,” says Dr. Schiff. “We have an open dialogue, he knows when to involve me, and we back each other up. In fact, as Chief PA, I let him recommend new PAs because I trust his judgment.”

Edelstein has a master’s degree in Physician Assistant Studies from the University of Nebraska, and was among the first PAs in New York State to earn the Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) in Emergency Medicine from NCCPA. The CAQ recognizes PAs who have completed rigorous requirements in their specialty, including specialty-focused procedures, patient case management, and passing an emergency medicine exam.

“I am always working to improve my skills and keep up with research on drug interactions and disease management to provide for critically ill patients,” he says.

Edelstein points out that more and more patients are looking up their providers on the Internet, and certification and qualifications make them comfortable. “Why wouldn’t an emergency medicine PA earn the CAQ?” he asks. “Physicians respect you if you know the latest studies and nomenclature and present it in a concise way. Preparing for the CAQ keeps you on top of your game.”