Communication is critical to the ongoing success of a practice, especially in today’s uncertain and challenging business climate. With many overworked and having little time for planning or evaluation, communication frequently falls through the cracks. In short, a practice that places “peer-to-peer communication” low on the list of priorities is setting itself up for failure. Physicians should always actively explore strategies to keep communication flowing in the office. One strategy that may enhance your chances for success is to conduct morning meetings identifying concerns and issues staff may be facing that day. Regular morning meetings set the stage for team cohesion and practice solidarity.

Case Study: Growing Too Fast
To see what kind of impact morning huddles can make, let us look at how it affects one individual practice. This practice is an established solo practice that was both productive and successful, with patients flocking through the door to receive high-quality service and care. After a while, however, the doctor reached his patient-load threshold and customer service began to slip. The doctor knew he needed help, so he hired an outside consultant who assisted the doctor in implementing several strategic moves aimed at maximizing physician and practice efficiency to meet practice growth.

Over the course of a year, the doctor added treatment rooms and medical assistants, re-engineered the infrastructure, and added an administrator to the management team. Even with this “help,” the practice just kept on growing, and patient demand continued to increase. Soon the doctor was fully booked for many months and could not accept new patients.

The consultant recommended recruiting another high-quality physician to join the staff. Everyone thought that doubling the amount of available physician time would solve all the growth-related problems and that soon the practice would be past the growing pains and operating like a well-oiled machine. The addition of a second physician, however, proved not to be the ultimate answer. Even with the new physician on board to complement the other strategic moves, the practice gears soon started squeaking more loudly than ever, and stress fractures began to appear in the framework. A major “check-up” was needed before the engine seized.

The Problem: Communication
To try to identify the real problem(s) facing the practice, management turned to a pair of related tools it trusted from experience—a patient satisfaction survey and an employee job satisfaction survey. Both survey tools had been used in the past to successfully identify problem areas and to help form plans to best meet challenges head-on. The two surveys were initiated under the watchful eye of the consultant who provided access to meaningful survey tools, ensuring confidentiality in order to gather useful information. Both surveys indicated the same thing: a lack of communication had everyone pointing accusatory fingers at everyone else.

It turned out that rapid practice growth combined with the addition of an administrator and a new physician resulted in a huge communication gap. Everyone was so busy that no one had time to talk to resolve challenges. Because no one was communicating, small problems became big problems and big problems became unbearable and debilitating.

Huddle Up For Success
Improved communication requires a vehicle that invites courteous, professional interaction between all parties (in this case between physicians and staff). The consultant mentioned that he had come across one such vehicle recently while attending a Cosmetic Boot Camp, where Dr. Marguerite Germain of South Carolina shared her key to success: a morning huddle. Every day before the first patient is roomed, Dr. Germain and her staff briefly meet or “huddle up.” The meeting, according to Dr. Germain, does not require any major behavioral changes and has led to increased team cohesion that is directly impacting the success of her own practice.

The morning huddle is a simple starting point to begin elevating the practice’s performance and opening up the communication lines. It is crucial that staff understand why huddles are necessary. They provide a forum where
Collagen Booster? A hormone may stimulate collagen production in aging skin, according to a report (Arch Dermatol. 2008;144[9]:1129-1140). Applying estradiol to the skin protected from the sun appears to stimulate the production of collagen in older men and women, but may not have the same effect on sun-exposed skin. Researchers observed volunteers treated with estradiol three times every other day on sun-protected areas for two weeks and noted a marked increase in production of collagen in women and, to a lesser extent, in men.

Synergistic Serum. SkinMedica recently launched its new TNS Essential Serum, a dual-chamber, anti-aging serum combining TNS Recovering Complex and new APS Corrective Complex. A mixture of three novel peptides and seven antioxidants, including the Ergothioneine (EGT), a natural amino acid with antioxidant properties, TNS Essential Serum regenerates the skin for a youthful appearance, SkinMedica says. In a recent study, 37 women aged 32-55 with mild to severe wrinkles used TNS Essential Serum twice-daily for three months: 89 percent saw improvement in overall skin tone and texture and all showed statistically significant improvement in wrinkles, elasticity, and UV protection.