



Going Green: Taming the board meeting paper monster

Nancy R. Kirsch, PT, DPT, PhD and Karen Wilk, PT, DPT

Note: The following article was developed from an educational session at the 2012 FSBPT annual meeting.

Board meeting information may be disseminated electronically, by paper or by a combination of both. For the past year, the New Jersey State Board of Physical Therapy, which convenes for full-day meetings once a month, has been exclusively using an electronic service, Bright Star, instead of paper.

BC – before computers – the executive director would prepare public and executive session agendas, compile materials and make copies for the board, attorney general and administrator. On average, 100+ pages were sent by two-day mail to board members, who received the materials about five days before the meeting. At times, the meeting materials were so numerous that they were delivered in a box. On average, each board member was getting a ream of paper per month.

The executive director would also hand out the agenda at the board meeting, often with an additional five or 10 items – along with the material that went with them.

One problem for the board was that if one of the late additions to the agenda involved patient records, or something of that nature, the decision would have to be tabled as the board would not have time to digest the material.

At other times, there was an issue because making copies of certain materials was simply cost prohibitive.

Questions for the audience (with percent of answers in parentheses)

When do you prepare for a meeting?

When you receive the information (0%)

The night before (75%)

On the way to the meeting (25%)

What make you think they prepare? (0%)

What is the primary deterrent to going green?

Security concerns (21%)

Cost (43%)

Board member resistance to change (29%)

Staff resistance to change (7%)

We were one of the first boards chosen by the division of consumer affairs to go green. We found that going electronic decreased administrative time – gathering the information, standing at the copier, collating copies and paper and mailing costs – but that the savings were offset by the cost of the electronic system. In effect, it was cost neutral. The electronic system is also ergonomically and environmentally friendly.

On the not-so-positive side of things, we found board members had various levels of comfort with the computer. Some did not know what a flash drive was, or how to use it. The learning curve varied as well. We did not have Internet access, although we consider that a good thing most of the time, as we knew members had to be looking at what we were discussing and were not surfing.

At first, the new system had a negative impact on control of the meeting as well. When we began using the electronic system, I had to stand most of the time to see over the desktops. When we switched to laptops, it became much more like a traditional meeting. I could see everyone! Also, we can go to tablets eventually.

On a more positive note, board members are reading the most current version of the agenda, can make notes on the flash drive, and can easily access all of the previous meetings, as well as rules and regulations, on the flash drive, as opposed to carting in paperwork from previous meetings.

Some board members were concerned about security, which is somewhat humorous as the papers were once sent via a public system such as UPS and FedEx. Members were worried that someone could hack into the system. But all files are encrypted, stored in the cloud hosted by Microsoft (on the same system used by the Department of Defense) and the material is backed up once an hour.

Cost comparison

A paperless system involves a one-time cost for the purchase of computers. However, we didn't buy any computers as they are provided as part of the Bright Star service. Computers are stored and wiped clean after each meeting after notes from each computer are downloaded to a flash drive.

Other paperless system ongoing costs are for agenda creation, maintenance of equipment and a monthly fee.

On the flip side, a paper system involves ongoing costs of paper, staff time, maintenance of equipment, cartridges and paper and mailing costs. As already mentioned, we found the switch to a paperless system to be cost neutral.

We've found that some other boards keep everything on their own intranet and others send out flash drive or CDs.

We only use a tiny fraction of the services provided by our electronic service, which, by the way, maintains both the hardware and software. The monthly fee, of course, depends on services provided.

Question for the audience (with percent of answers in parentheses)

What is most difficult thing about meeting preparation?

Creating agenda (0%)

Gathering support documents (43%)

Dissemination to the board (14%)

Late arriving materials (43%)

As we expected, the greatest benefit to the system is the reduction in the amount of paper shifting. Our agenda is built throughout the month, and documents are uploaded to the server. Once everything is prepared, the material can be disseminated. Members may access the agenda, annotate documents, make notes and recommendations and receive agenda alerts if there are updates. Also, members receive only the agendas that affect them. If they are not on a certain committee, members will not receive that agenda. The author may also search and view already-published agendas, which is really searching the file cabinet in the cloud. Furthermore, members may pinpoint old agenda items to use in a new agenda and share documents used in already-published agendas.

Question for the audience (with percent of answers in parentheses)

How do you manage information for a recused board member?

Send all the material with a note not to peek at certain items (0%)

Cut the material out of the minutes or leave it out of the packet (42%)

Tell the member to turn the information in when they get to the meeting (25%)

Nobody ever gets recused. (33%)

With the electronic system, the administration can add members, remove members, recuse members and send contact information and email alerts to all members. Advanced functions allow the administration to add authors, control sharing of unpublished agenda items/documents and permit a contributing author.

The system also allows board members to navigate the agenda tree, review associated documents, go to a page and make notes. You can run everything off a flash drive, save everything to a flash drive and save other files, statutes and rules and regulations. You can also harvest notes from other board members when doing the minutes. Best of all, people can come and go with their flash drive – no carts, cartons or packs of papers.

What 'going green' is and isn't

Going green is not the solution to board meeting length, to members being prepared, to the expense and time associated with meetings or to the volume of information received (actually, you may receive more items on PDF).

However, going green is a better way to manage paper more efficiently and more securely, an efficient way to build an agenda between meetings and a cost-effective, ergonomic and ecological solution to paper proliferation.



Nancy R. Kirsch, PT, DPT, PhD, *Director of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey*

Nancy R. Kirsch is a professor of physical therapy and Director of the Doctor of Physical Therapy Program at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey in Newark, NJ. She provides school based physical therapy services in Morris County. She currently serves on the New Jersey Board of Physical Therapy Examiners. She is Vice President of the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. Dr. Kirsch writes a monthly column in *PT in Motion* called Ethics in Action.



Karen E. Wilk, PT, DPT, *Director of Rehabilitation Medicine at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center, Englewood NJ*

Karen began serving on the Board of Physical Therapy Examiners in 2001 and assumed the chairmanship in 2008. She presents lectures in ethics and New Jersey Jurisprudence. Dr. Wilk is also a member of the Council of Hospital Directors and served the organization as secretary.