

A Win, Win Relationship...

Continuing Education Offers Benefits for Biomed, Employers

Andrea Hall

Whether you're looking to enhance your skills, learn how to service a new piece of equipment, or master a specialty, continuing education is an important part of your career.

It can be equally important to your employer, notes Jim Rider, chief operating officer of Bio-Electronics, a medical equipment service company based in Lincoln, NE. "To stay competitive, a very high priority should be placed on continuing education," says Rider.

According to education providers in the field, service professionals need a minimum of two weeks of training each year to keep abreast of technological advances and changes. "A small investment on the part of the hospital can result in tremendous cost savings," says Terrence Speth, owner and president of the Radiological Service Training Institute (RSTI) in Solon, OH. "By training in-house people to service equipment, a hospital can get its maintenance costs down to 4% of the replacement value."

"Education should be a part of every organization's budget," agrees Manny Roman, president of DITEC, also located in Solon, OH. "It's a shame that when cuts are made, training is often the first to go."

Where to Get It

RSTI and DITEC are among the prominent educators in continuing education for biomed. These schools offer hands-on training in imaging systems, with classes in magnetic resonance imaging, computed tomography, ultrasound, picture archiving and communications systems, and DICOM, as well as manufacturer-specific training for GE, Philips, OEC, and other products.

Both schools offer similar five-level programs, ranging from fundamentals of servicing diagnostic imaging equipment (level 1, DITEC) to filmless integration (phase V, RSTI). "The courses are done in

Check Points

Various continuing education programs are available to meet your needs.

- ✓ DITEC and RSTI offer hands-on training in imaging systems
- ✓ AAMI, RSNA, and local biomedical associations offer diverse educational offerings

five-part series, depending on how in-depth the hospitals want to service their equipment," says Speth. Both schools also train managers who want to implement in-house imaging maintenance programs and both hold on-site training upon request.

George Hajduk, who has completed the first four classes in DITEC's five-level program, says they are designed primarily for biomed who work in-house or for third-party service providers, since original equipment manufacturers have their own schools for their product lines. Hajduk attended training at the request of his employer, Synernet, a hospital-owned service organization in Portland, ME. "One of our clients wanted to reduce the cost of their service contracts" by training him to repair imaging equipment.

These courses are also available at various conferences and symposiums, such as those sponsored by AAMI, the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA), and local biomedical associations. Some of the courses are given by RSTI or DITEC and are condensed versions of the classes offered in Ohio.

Some biomed also seek out continuing education at community colleges. For example, employees of Bio-Electronics take courses in Lincoln, NE, and Sioux City, IA, Rider says. He adds that several medical parts companies, such as ReMedPar of Goodlettsville, TN, also provide training. Those wishing to advance their

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skills on a specific piece of equipment can contact the manufacturer for training opportunities.

Distance or online continuing education has traditionally not been available for biomed because of the need for hands-on instruction. However, some of the fundamentals classes lend themselves to distance learning, says Roman. DITEC has partnered with CTI of Lewisville, TX, a biomed training institute, to provide pre-recorded lectures via the Internet. "We're trying to reach people who can't travel to the schools," says CTI director, Mark Cooper.

Decisions, Decisions

So how do schools determine which classes to offer? Each year, RSTI surveys the field to assess training needs and then responds by developing course content to meet those needs. Some of the more popular classes include principles of servicing diagnostic x-ray systems, advanced radiographic systems maintenance, customer satisfaction skills, and PACS. Management courses at

both schools are popular as well.

Most classes last two weeks, with about half the time devoted to hands-on learning and half to lecture. Prior to taking his first class at DITEC, Hajduk was trying to self-train on x-ray equipment. The level 1 class "was the eye opener for me," he says. "I thought, 'Oh, this is how it works.' It gave me the fundamentals."

Paying Your Way

With some courses costing more than \$4,000, the decision to take continuing education may not always be a simple one. Luckily for most students, their employers pay their tuition and travel costs. If a student is paying his or her own expenses, DITEC offers an up-front discount and a payment plan is set up. Some RSTI students also pay their own way. However, there's such demand for service professionals in the industry that most people have a job by the time they've taken one or two classes, says Speth. Although it can be expensive, most agree that the cost of continuing education is worth it. ■

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