

PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP

A Resource You Cannot Go Without

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Leadership is the key ingredient to successfully executing the organization's strategies. Without effective leadership there is a high probability that the selected strategies will not meet their full potential. Having the resources and the best ideas does not translate into making a strategy come to life and move from a dream to reality. Effective leadership is what causes all your work and preparation to generate the desired results. It is all about execution and high level execution is a function of effective leadership.

Healthcare organizations, and particularly provider health-care organizations, are facing challenging times due to the impact of Healthcare Reform. To meet these challenges they are developing complex strategies to position themselves to survive certain changes in the way healthcare will be delivered and reimbursed. Providers, both hospitals and physicians, will need to be aligned in order to execute these strategies.

“The physician leader has to work collaboratively with other members of the executive team to be at the forefront of this movement to deliver higher-quality, safer care”

— Mark Rumans, M.D.
Physician in Chief at the Billings Clinic

It will take effective leadership from both hospitals and physicians to achieve the high level execution necessary to make these strategies come to life. The leadership talent in the hospitals is well developed whereas the leadership talent within the medical community is thin and underdeveloped. Over the last 40 years, we have required physicians to center their

attention on being great clinicians. Being a high functioning clinician is very different than being an effective leader. In fact, some of the skills and traits that permit physicians to be great clinicians get in the way of what it takes to be an effective leader.

For years we referred to working with physicians like herding cats. Being independent, directing, singularly focused and firm in their views is what makes physicians successful in treating their patients. However, these same traits are not helpful when it comes to building teams, creating long term strategies, influencing others, collaborating or being adaptable.

Physicians often confuse Management from Leadership. This confusion is caused by organizations that offer “Leadership” courses when in fact the material offered in the course is management material. Management skills relate to technical skills- accounting, finance, strategy, planning, etc. All leaders need to have the required management skills but having that knowledge does not make a physician a leader.

“But now new research suggests that having a doctor in charge at the top is connected to overall better patient care and a better hospital”

— Tara Parker-Pope,
“Should Hospitals Be Run by Doctors?”

Organizations need leadership from the medical community in order to drive the needed changes in how medicine is practiced so we can achieve the strategies which require lower medical costs, fewer errors, and higher service levels.

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Healthcare Reform will turn the physician's world upside down and it will take effective physician leaders to lead their colleagues through these changes. Managed care failed because business people tried to force the way physicians practiced medicine. Healthcare Reform places the physician in the position of driving how medicine will be practiced which is why effective physician leadership is key to implementing the organization's Healthcare Reform strategies.

CASE

There have always been physician leaders. The only difference is now we need many more physician leaders than ever before. Every organization is forming some kind of physician organization which will be asked to achieve lower medical costs, higher service levels, and fewer medical errors. As organizations go about looking for the physician leaders to manage these physician organizations, they are asking search firms to find the needed talent. The issue is the available talent pool of physician leaders is very thin. Some of these organizations are selecting physicians on their staff to fill these roles. Often these organizations select those physicians who are trusted, loyal, possess strong clinical skills, and are dedicated but not proven effective leaders. Trusted, loyal, respected clinically and dedicated are good traits but effective leaders also know how to build effective teams, establish compelling visions, lead through influence, hold others and themselves accountable, and are adaptable and flexible.

CURRENT SITUATION AND DESIRED FUTURE STATE

The future of many provider organizations is dependent on effective physician leadership. The need is immediate and large while the available talent pool is limited. Organizations need to develop a physician leadership strategy as a part of their overall strategy.

Organizations can fulfill their physician leadership needs by recruiting from outside the organization or recruiting from within the organization. As stated previously, the talent pool for experienced physician leaders is thin so going to the outside, while an option, may not provide better candidates than you have within your organization.

Selecting potential physician leaders for immediate and future needs from within your organization needs to go beyond looking for a physician who is trusted, loyal, possess strong clinical skills, and dedicated. The physician must also have the desire to be a leader, have some natural leadership ability, be willing to learn, and have a track record as a leader.

A national study conducted in collaboration with American College of Physician Executives and the Health Administration Program at University of North Florida determined that the following 12 behavioral competencies are needed in effective physician leaders.

- Integrity
- Trust and Respect
- Develop Relationships
- Leadership
- Skillful Communication
- Conflict Management
- Judgment
- Accountability
- Collaborative Facilitation
- Motivate Others
- Strategic Perspective
- Adaptability

These are behaviors will permit the physician leaders to lead other physicians in order to execute the organization's Healthcare Reform strategies. This list can be supplemented with the competencies that are unique for the organization based on that organization's culture. When recruiting, developing, and selecting physician leaders within your organization it is important to be able to assess the potential candidates in each one of these areas.

“As already complex health care organizations grow exponentially more complicated, their leaders realize they need to dedicate resources to the development of their physician leaders with internal programs”

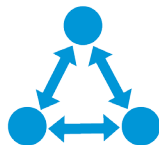
— Laura Avakian,
On Hospital Agenda: Developing
Physician Leaders, H&HN Daily

CONCLUSIONS

Effective Physician Leadership within the organization needs to be a priority for organizations that hope to survive and thrive in the healthcare world of tomorrow. To meet your short term and long term physician leadership needs it will be important to allocate resources to find, educate, and deploy them throughout the organization.



STRATEGY



LEADERSHIP



PERFORMANCE

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