



Realizing Hospitalist Excellence

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It is often said in the health care industry: “If you have seen one hospitalist program, you have seen just one hospitalist program.” The specialty of hospitalist medicine is still evolving, and so is the hospitalist physicians’ role as an effective manager of the patient care experience. Providing this level of care requires a combination of clinical excellence, operational efficiency and a positive patient experience. And the hospitalist physician is at the heart of it. Patient care must be placed as the highest priority for any hospital provider and obtaining a high-performing hospitalist program is a collaborative effort.

The Move to a Hospitalist Model

Market conditions have forced hospitals and physicians to reinvent the way they do business and for some, the hospitalist program has become an attractive option. Hospitals are embracing the program for the increased level of care, flexibility and community acceptance, and physicians find a specialist practice with an inpatient philosophy an outstanding alternative to private practice.

The Key Elements of Hospitalist Excellence

How a hospital embraces the hospitalist program and providers has impacts the larger commitment to the health system, well beyond the patient level. Conflict is inherent to any large organization. Mitigating conflict and ensuring an open and transparent process benefits the entire health system, from executive to patient. Any successful, profitable and sustainable hospitalist program begins at the top with both the health system and hospital leadership recognizing their program cannot operate without these key elements:

- 1 *Collaboration* – Ensuring the hospitalists, referring physicians and hospital staff are all aligned to establish policies and procedures, metrics and reporting systems.

Hospitalist medicine is here to stay as the hospitalist providers who are specifically focused on improving health outcomes, do not have an outpatient practice and provide a positive patient experience.

- ② *Stakeholder alignment* – Establishing expectations and commitments among all participants.
- ③ *New lines of communication* – Creating a strong, transparent communication plan with strategies for consistent improvement.
- ④ *Market conditions* – Understanding how market conditions can positively and negatively affect the success of the program.
- ⑤ *Management support* – Ensuring management provides on-going support for all departments - equally and consistently.

Collaboration

Hospital executives set the tone for an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration among all teams.

Collaboration between consultants, case managers, emergency room providers and nurses ensures optimal care is delivered during a patient's stay. And the patient leaves the hospital, it's necessary to collaborate with the primary care physician on follow-up appointments to support that patient's on-going health.

To highlight the accomplishments of the hospitalist service to other areas of the hospital, a reporting system is necessary. It's best for hospital and health system executives as well as the hospitalist team to collaborate on what is measured and how often. This creates a level of trust among all groups and ultimately enhances the hospitalist-patient experience.

Stakeholder Alignment

It is critical that all who play a vital role in the success of the hospitalist program – health system and hospital executives, practicing physicians and consultants – are aligned and understand the purpose and objectives of the program.

Ideally, stakeholders are engaged early on in the process or prior to deployment. This helps to ensure they remain involved in the decision-making process and can result in these success factors:

- An environment that increases the governance and strategic direction
- Improved communication with health system leadership



- Alignment of performance objectives with compensation methodologies
- Enhanced admission process from the Emergency Department to hospital floor
- Development of metric reporting to enhance the overall effectiveness of the hospitalist service
- Creation of a discharge process which places the experience of the patient first
- Alignment of business objectives and goals to minimize gaps in existing and future plans for the hospitalist program

New Lines of Communication

A complete and transparent communication plan involving all key constituents in the delivery of care and improved patient experience positively impacts the organization and the patients. Benefits of improved communication include:

- Compact implementation between the Emergency Department and Hospitalists
- Primary care follow-up appointment scheduled for the patient prior to the discharge from the hospital
- Effective cadence in case management meetings to ensure appropriate utilization of each stakeholder's time commitment
- The hospitalists and nursing embracing a mutual respect for each other focusing on the care of the patient
- Enhanced peer-to-peer relationships in which the hospitalist is consistently managing the case
- Effective face-to-face coordination between the health system executives and the hospitalists to address actionable matters from the metric analytics

While new lines of communication are being established, it is vital to recalibrate often to validate the hospitalist program is headed in the right direction. As well as share the results with hospitalist providers and other stakeholders who are real drivers of continuity within the program.

Realizing hospitalist excellence means higher performance, lower costs, and an improved patient experience.

Market Conditions

In health care, change is constant. But when anticipated, change can happen more seamlessly and with minimal disruption to the overall objectives.

Ensuring success during change requires a deep understanding of the factors that can impact the system both positively and negatively, such as patient demographics, providers entering and exiting the marketplace, patient population changes, hospitalists' quality of life and equitable compensation. Other outside factors which are harder to predict include cost of living, economic climate, political considerations and natural disasters.

Management Support

Support and commitment from health system management and individual hospitals is essential for keeping hospitalist providers engaged. Management support helps to mitigate conflict and alleviate any challenges that may arise between other hospital departments, consultants and hospitalist providers. As with any successful program, if management involvement wanes, departments will revert to old policies and procedures which may not align with a successful hospitalist program.

Summary

To experience a truly realized hospitalist service excellence program, transparent communications must occur between the health system, hospital, provider consultants, emergency department providers and the hospitalist providers. This transparency maximizes the hospitalist engagement which leads to an enhanced patient experience.

- An effective deployment plan provides for an engaged and empowered leadership team in the hospitalist program, which is the first step in realizing hospitalist excellence. Indicators of excellence include:
Hospitalists collaborate with emergency room providers, consultants, case managers, nurses and the patients' primary care physician to deliver the best care and a positive patient experience
- The hospitalist is seen as the decision maker and is accountable to the overall care of the patient by all parties



- Measureable results demonstrate an improved patient experience, appropriate hospital stays, decreased readmissions due to post-discharge follow-up appointments and applicable resource utilization
- Hospitalist providers feel respected by their peers and constituents as well as their employer
- Hospitalists are viewed as indispensable to the success of the hospital

Is Your Program Ready for a Change?

The following scenarios may indicate there is room for improvement in your hospitalist program.

- Emergency department providers, consultants, nurses, case managers and hospitalist providers do not communicate or respect one another's opinions.
- Quality financial and operational metrics are lacking and not shared with the health system and hospital executive leadership.
- Patients are discharged from the hospital without a scheduled follow-up appointment with their primary care physician in the community.

The Solution

Realizing hospitalist excellence requires investment and trust in hospitalist providers that they are accountable for a patient's care during their hospital stay. Success is dependent on transparent communication and active participation among all stakeholders, as well as quality metrics that are collaboratively analyzed and acted upon to make improvements along the way.

The Results

Realizing hospitalist excellence means higher performance, lower costs, and an improved patient experience. These benefits are the result of providers, executives and partners in caregiving operating as a team in the hospitalist excellence model.

With ongoing communication, measurement and recalibration the program can continue to evolve to meet the needs of the health system's providers and patients.



About the Author

Bryan Weiss is managing director for solutions design at MedSynergies. Prior to joining MedSynergies, Mr. Weiss was president of the hospitalist division of Hospital Physician Partners. Previously, he served as chief operating officer of inpatient services for EmCare, Inc. In this role, Mr. Weiss was responsible for the profitability of the hospitalist division based on contract management and client retention. Prior to EmCare, Mr. Weiss was vice president of financial planning & acquisitions finance for IPC The Hospitalist Company where he developed payor relationships, managed the financial and legal due diligence in mergers and acquisitions and ultimate integration of independent hospitalist practices. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from California State University, as well as a Master's in Business Administration from California Lutheran University.

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