

Career Building: How Physician Leaders Can Stand Out

By Daniel Dimenstein, Associate

Physician leadership roles come in many shapes and sizes, from the more traditional vice president of medical affairs and chief medical officer to the more modern chief clinical officer. While there is no defined path to securing positions like these, there are some concrete steps to take to increase a physician's competitiveness as a leadership candidate, as healthcare systems increasingly look to incorporate physicians into the C-suite. As a note, the assumption by healthcare organizations assessing candidates for physician executive roles is that a potential candidate is a high-quality clinician. So, candidates must take additional steps to differentiate themselves from their peers.

- **Get involved with hospital committees.** Hospitals of all sizes typically have a variety of committees on which members of the medical staff can sit. Whether it is the pharmacy and therapeutics committee, the quality committee, peer review committee, or informatics committee, participation will provide exposure to the inner workings of the hospital.
- **Become a leader on the medical staff.** Many times, medical staff leadership positions are elected positions. Sitting on hospital committees and volunteering to lead initiatives creates visibility and shows leadership. This type of engagement many times organically leads to the opportunity to take on defined leadership roles within the medical staff.
- **Appreciate the importance of quality and process improvement.** Hospitals and healthcare systems are finding that they can achieve two of the three points of the "Triple Aim" by improving standardization of care practices and reducing variation. Physician executive candidates with training in process improvement methodologies such as Lean and Six Sigma are becoming more and more attractive. Similarly, demonstrating an understanding of clinical information systems and the role of IT in healthcare is important.
- **Get involved in professional organizations.** Organizations such as the American Association of Physician Leaders (AAPL) and the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) can expose physicians to additional education on what is going on in healthcare across the country, and can provide incredible networking opportunities.
- **Obtain advanced degrees and certifications.** Physician executive roles are becoming more and more strategic, and it is becoming essential for candidates to demonstrate their financial and operational

proficiency. An MBA, MHA or equivalent degree is a differentiator. Credentials such as Certified Physician Executive (CPE) and Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives (FACHE) are becoming more prevalent as well.

- **Stay up to date on any clinical and board certifications.** For a physician executive, credibility is key – it is what separates a chief physician executive from those in the C-suite without medical degrees.
- **Write a business resumé.** The most important questions to answer on a business resumé are: “Where did you work? When did you work there? What did you accomplish during your time there?” Remember to quantify accomplishments. For instance, writing about leading an initiative that resulted in a reduction in length of stay is significantly less effective than specifying by how much length of stay reduced as a result of the initiative.
- **Do not job hop.** Nothing turns off potential employers like the fear of having to fill the same position a year from now. A demonstrated commitment to a job and organization goes a long way.
- **Reach out to an executive recruiter.** Build a relationship with an executive recruiter before you need them. Hospitals and health systems often partner with executive search firms in their search to fill physician executive positions. A recruiter will be able to articulately explain the typical recruitment process and answer questions. As these search firms are typically retained by the hospitals and health systems, there will be no financial obligation to candidates seeking general advice.

About the Author

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