For Long-term Care Leaders, Is There Life After Consolidation?

An Interview with Jennifer Bauer, Consultant

Like healthcare in general, the long-term care world is undergoing a wave of consolidation as organizations seek to share resources, cut costs, and generally manage the effects of sweeping reform.

When consolidation happens, it often creates a dilemma of who will lead. The expanded system or network must turn to a seasoned CEO and other top executives who can oversee the integration of diverse organizations and set a strategic course in an ever-shifting marketplace.

“A more perplexing issue,” says Witt/Kieffer consultant Jennifer Bauer, “is how to incorporate these long-term care and post-acute leaders into the larger organization. These once-autonomous CEOs and directors of LTC facilities or services are now brought together under one umbrella, jostling for position in a strange new environment. Will they have a seat at the table alongside acute care colleagues?”

In a recent article for McKnight’s Long-term Care News, Bauer notes that veteran executives may be given key administrative positions within the system yet experience an inevitable loss of autonomy. “A common lament among executives who have been brought into the fold of integrated systems or networks is that they are reduced to ‘site managers’ or role players,” she writes.

Survival and success

How can long-term care leaders carve out a satisfying niche in a newly consolidated environment — within a “broader, flatter, more centralized network”? Bauer offers several steps to take:

1. Assert your expertise.
2. Stay abreast of healthcare reform.
3. Embrace partnering and collaboration.
4. Be flexible.

This last point is critical, she notes. “Business models are changing, with no clear picture of tomorrow’s longterm care landscape yet established. . . .executives will need to test what works in their local markets while staying in tune with national best practices (and their organizations’ preferred methods of operation).”
Long-term care organizations face a brave, new world, Bauer concludes. For executives to be much more than mere role players, they must anticipate, and embrace, change. Life for long-term care leaders will never be the same . . . but that’s not necessarily a bad thing.

About the Author

Jennifer Bauer, consultant, brings strong experience and industry understanding to her assignments for healthcare, senior living, education and not-for-profit clients at acute care hospitals, and health systems, colleges, universities and academic medical centers, and not-for-profit organizations.

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