

Leaders in Hospital Medicine

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In an era of healthcare reform, a significant and critical role has emerged for physicians practicing inpatient medicine. The focus on best practices, bundled payments, pay for performance and new laws penalizing hospitals for readmissions and medication errors have brought to light a real recognition and need for hospitalists. Hospitalists are involved in patient stays from admission to discharge, and as a result, are in the most logical position to reduce length of stay, readmission and cost.

Hospital medicine is the fastest growing medical specialty in the United States; current numbers now show over 30,000 hospitalists. In an effort to reduce costs, improve quality and standardize overall efficiency of patient care, hospitals and medical group practices are looking to their hospital medicine programs.

As the field of hospital medicine quickly evolves, the role of the hospitalist becomes more complex. These physicians are major contributors to a timely, effective and safe inpatient stay. However, training to care for patients is one thing; establishing and directing a high performing team is quite another. While hospitalists undergo rigorous patient care training, their formal education rarely includes leadership development and training.

Over the next two years, approximately 57% of hospitals expect to expand their hospitalist programs, and 44% of those without programs are planning to establish one. This boom in the field is

creating a dearth of experienced leaders that have the ability to develop, expand and direct these programs. Furthermore, the already small pool of experienced hospitalist leaders is in high demand and needs to enhance its leadership skills to meet the needs of their organizations.

In the last 18 months, Witt/Kieffer has experienced a dramatic increase in search assignments to identify hospital medicine leaders with a track record of success — specifically those with experience leading programs that have transitioned from small groups of 4-8 hospitalists to large complex groups of over 15 physicians and numerous mid-level providers. Many clients are expanding their hospital medicine programs to multiple sites and do not have a hospitalist leader with the skill set to lead a program of this complexity and magnitude. Even early adopters of hospital medicine now realize that they have not created a well thought out hospitalist succession plan and are poorly positioned to develop future leaders.

As drivers of change, hospitalist leaders are expected to have experience in the development and deployment of program infrastructure, as well as a solid understanding of process management and the delivery of service excellence. Hospitalist leaders must be able to engage their teams, establish cohesiveness and group culture. They must work with their teams to establish standards of care, improve clinical outcomes, be cognizant of patient and physician satisfaction, improve and maintain financial performance, reduce costs, eliminate waste, improve inpatient flow and grow the hospitalist service. As if these challenges were not enough, hospitalist leaders must also contend with staff turnover due to the high demand for hospitalists and opportunities tied to lucrative salaries.

In order to overcome the leadership dearth that exists in hospitalist management, hospitals need to work closely with their hospitalist teams to identify and develop future physician leaders. Succession planning should

not be limited to the C-Suite. The Society of Hospital Medicine offers leadership courses and training programs rooted in the core competencies in hospital medicine. These leadership programs are designed to provide hospitalist leaders with the skills and resources they need to effectively manage hospital medicine programs.

The most successful hospitalist leaders have a passion for providing high quality

care and streamlining processes. They possess the attributes and skills necessary to engage, motivate and empower physicians, creating a highly effective hospitalist team. Moving forward, hospitalist leaders must understand the importance of a team-based approach to provide care, implement methods to improve that approach and have the skills to meet the challenges inherent to the future of our health care system.

Locations Nationwide:

Oak Brook, IL	Atlanta, GA	Minneapolis, MN	Philadelphia, PA
Emeryville, CA	Burlington, MA	St. Louis, MO	Pittsburgh, PA
Irvine, CA	Nantucket, MA	New York, NY	Houston, TX
Denver, CO	Bethesda, MD	Toledo, OH	Seattle, WA