How can we be leaders, physicians may ask, when often we are overwhelmed by the daily challenge to survive? I contend that we have no choice.

Source: Physicians Practice

The second year of insurance exchanges is underway, and the push toward accountable care organizations is increasing. Our challenge at the Council of Accountable Physician Practices (CAPP) is to figure out how physicians can learn to collaborate better with each other, integrate with hospital leadership, move from fee-for-service to bundled payments and pre-payment, and provide ever higher quality to our patients.

There has never been a time when leadership and forward thinking is more important to our profession. This case for increased investment in physician leadership training was made clearly in the first in a series of articles on physician leadership in Healthcare: the Journal of Delivery Science and Innovation, based on a research project conducted by CAPP.

How can we be leaders, you may ask, when often we are overwhelmed by the daily challenge to survive? I contend that, given the increasing demands on physicians, there is no way we cannot take leadership for the future of American healthcare. As we move away from the old fee-for-service model and toward pay for improved clinical outcomes, physicians must lead the process. As our nation embraces quality and performance metrics, physicians need to be the ones to determine which are in the interests of patients, and which are not. If physicians don’t lead these conversations, others will, and the result is likely to be negative for the profession of medicine.

So what can physicians do to become good leaders? Here are some suggestions:

1. **Stay informed.** Even if you are not involved in some of the new configurations in healthcare delivery like accountable care organizations or medical homes, keep abreast of how they are evolving and doing. We all read publications like the New England Journal of Medicine for our clinical expertise. Add to that other publications about the practice of medicine and the evolution of healthcare delivery such as Physicians Practice, Modern Healthcare, Medical Economics and HealthLeaders, as well as business journals, such as the Harvard Business Review. Try to attend at least one conference a year that is focused on the future of medicine.

2. **Get involved.** Larger and more organized health systems and medical groups have projects underway to test or implement the best strategies to improve patient care, while reducing costs. Find out what these projects are and ask to get involved. This will help you better understand your organization’s business strategy, see healthcare reforms in action, and to interact with colleagues.

3. **Understand and develop your own leadership skills.** The research referenced above conducted by CAPP surveyed a sampling of physician leaders and found that three skill sets were deemed most important to effectively lead physicians:
   A. Personal core capabilities: A potential leader’s ability to adapt in personal and professional roles.
   B. Leadership behavior: The way that leadership is expressed — is critical. Personal and professional congruency, the desire to work toward the greater good, and the ability to communicate a vision to inspire others to follow, are examples of good leadership behavior.
   C. Business experience: While more and more physicians are acquiring MBAs and masters in health administration, using this knowledge is only effective when physicians are able to interact and work effectively with administrative colleagues on management, strategy, and finance.

Find out if your organization has a leadership training program for its staff and physicians, and if it does, participate. If your practice is small, look into some of the corporate leadership training programs available through a variety of medical societies and through external consulting firms. Leadership is, at its core, the ability to see where your organization needs to go, figure out the best road map to get there, assemble and inspire your team and guide them confidently through any murky waters. It demands the ability to make the right diagnosis, prescribe the optimal treatment, and help people to achieve the best results.

Who better to lead the evolution of American healthcare than physicians? We would not want others...
telling us how to practice, but they will unless we step forward and rise to the challenge. I am optimistic that if physicians take the lead, the outcome for patients and for the practice of medicine will be best. But if we don’t, we will regret having missed the opportunity.

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