



Doctors helping patients for more than 25 years

Leadership Development for Physicians

Health care in the 21st century faces a number of complex problems that benefit from involvement of competent doctor leaders. And while many physicians possess the raw capability of becoming organization shapers, proactive development of leadership skills is critical before these potential leaders can most effectively impact the way health care is delivered.

Research shows a strong correlation between physician leadership and overall hospital quality. The logic of this relationship becomes especially obvious when one considers the many complicated, and often, conflicting issues in modern health care. From the labyrinthine external environment of insurance and regulations to the broad internal standards tied to expense, clinical achievement and patient quality, navigating the way forward demands the ability to show system-level thinking mixed with an intimate understanding of medicine itself. Combined with the ever-accelerating pace of science and technology — and the accompanying needs for adaptability and collaboration — it's no wonder hospitals as well as other health-oriented organizations place a premium on physician leaders.

Dr. Nutson, Medical Director in Austin for WellMed Medical Group, explains that “The leadership training I have received at WellMed has helped me better understand myself and how I effect those around me. It did not simply make me more successful in the business but also changed my relationships at home and with my patients.”

In many cases, doctors are promoted to positions of leadership due to their research skills or clinical expertise. Unfortunately, professional competence doesn't always equate to leadership ability, and the skills needed for success in an exam room vs. boardroom aren't necessarily the same.

Similar to other industries, medical leadership requires strategic thinking and a strong sense of organizational awareness. Being able to interpret financials, evaluate key metrics and anticipate trends are all elements that may not be routinely taught in medical school but can make a big impact as physicians take on increasing responsibilities. People skills, including communication and team-building, are also important, especially considering the delicate balance between doctor-valued autonomy and system-required cooperation.

Medical skills require systematic training to fully develop, and so do leadership skills. While ideally this process should start in medical school, opportunities to improve should also exist at every stage of a physician's career.

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Leadership Development for Physicians cont.

Leadership development courses are one way to meet this need. While these classes can take many different formats, their ultimate goal is the same: provide physicians with the practical tools necessary to become effective leaders in their profession. Although some hospitals offer their own leadership development courses, many take advantage of independent organizations specializing in leadership training.

Some of the most effective leadership development courses share the characteristic of being immersive. Often held off-site, they may invite physicians and professional administrators to attend together, strengthening the overall model of management. In some cases, the training is even designed to simulate a day in the life of a physician leader, creating a safe-space to practice and evaluate the kinds of high-stakes decisions common in health care administration. By bringing together doctors with varying degrees of leadership experience, these courses provide opportunities for modeling and mentoring that can continue even after the course ends.

Dr. Laura Huete, Senior Medical Director for WellMed Medical Group, said “I am grateful to WellMed for providing me with the leadership and management training that I need to become a successful medical director and physician leader. The training has included personal development as well as learning business skills that have enhanced my ability to support the clinics that I lead.”

While not every physician needs an MBA, virtually all physicians can benefit from some degree of leadership development. As the health care world becomes increasingly complex, having physicians who not only have mastered a medical specialty, but also possess basic business skills and have an understanding of how to lead and motivate others in their field will only become more important.