

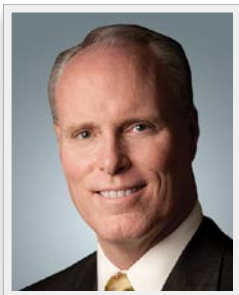
Beyond Governance to True Physician Leadership Engagement

BY CHRISTOPHER D. VAN GORDER, FACHE, SCRIPPS HEALTH

Physician leadership and engagement is critical to hospitals and health systems in this time of historic change for the healthcare industry. The most obvious avenue for physician engagement is a seat on the governing board. But this is not the only option health systems have.

Besides board governance, there are many other pathways to physician leadership that can provide perhaps even more engagement in strategy, quality, operations, medical management, contracting, and all aspects of healthcare delivery.

One such method is to create a group of physicians and hospital administrators who work together on traditional strategy and operations issues outside the formal structure of the management team or medical staff. This group can offer tremendous influence and provide true representation for large numbers of physicians if it is composed of physician-elected leaders (chiefs of staff and vice chiefs of staff). At Scripps Health, we formed such a group more than 10 years ago. We call it the Physician Leadership Cabinet (PLC), which consists of the aforementioned elected physician leaders and our hospital chief executives; I serve as co-chair along with our chief medical officer. Regular monthly meetings provide an ongoing forum for dealing with operational issues, clinical care, business strategies, and any other issues a physician leader would like on the agenda. The PLC endorses the physician work groups the healthcare system uses and appoints physicians serving on those work groups. As a result, the PLC has both formal and informal authority. With physician and administrative leaders working together, we fill the “gap of information” that often exists between these two groups and provide a forum for bringing their expertise to the decision-making process. And it works, as every recommendation the PLC has made, since its creation, has been accepted.



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Another avenue we have for physician leadership with more formal governance power is the accountable care organization medical management board, ScrippsCare. It is a mutual benefit corporation and a subsidiary of Scripps Health. This board brings together physician leaders of our affiliated medical groups, community representatives, and a corporate representative to build a

fully integrated network of ambulatory and inpatient services to enhance patient care. Each representative has one vote—including the healthcare system—so the majority control lies with physicians. This is a model in which physician leaders have authority and governance in the area they care about the most—the operations of our accountable care organization.

Hospitals and health systems can make such meaningful physician engagement possible in every aspect of their organizations, providing co-management opportunities for more physician leaders than ever before. From care lines to support services to information systems, wherever strategic and operational decisions are being made, there are opportunities for physician



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engagement. Whether they are boards, workgroups, oversight committees, or operations councils, these are the places where physicians can provide leadership, engage with management in both clinical and non-clinical efforts, and contribute to the improvements being made in quality, safety, cost reduction, and operational efficiency.

Hospitals and health systems can make meaningful physician engagement possible in every aspect of their organizations, providing co-management opportunities for more physician leaders than ever before. From care lines to support services to information systems, wherever strategic and operational decisions are being made, there are opportunities for physician engagement.

When more physicians are at the table and involved in decision making, their formal and informal power is strengthened and their morale is improved. It's beneficial for physicians and for the hospital or health system. Greater physician engagement accelerates the change organizations need to succeed in this new healthcare environment, and it prepares the next generation of physician leaders to guide their organizations well into the future. ●

The Governance Institute thanks Christopher D. Van Gorder, FACHE, president and CEO of Scripps Health in San Diego, for contributing this article. He can be reached at vangorder.chris@scrippshealth.org.