Engaging Busy Physicians
Tools to Build Meaningful Connections

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Overview

In today’s healthcare environment, physicians are bombarded with the need to keep current with the latest technology, treatment protocols, and changes to health plans and reimbursement structures. Quality data, benchmarking and rapidly changing information systems provide yet another layer of information that physicians need to know. Furthermore, the volume of health related content being created and distributed via social networking channels is next to impossible to keep up with.

Add to that the continuous process of vertical and clinical integration, formation of accountable care organizations and patient-centered medical homes, aggregation and consolidation of physician practices, creation of direct primary care models, and retail clinics – it is a wonder that physicians have a moment to actually practice medicine and provide care to the patients who need their help.

As healthcare leaders, administrators and professionals who need the participation and input of the physicians in our organizations and our communities, how do we help them find the time to be involved in a manner that is meaningful and convenient while providing the foundation of support and collaboration that is needed to advance the health systems’ priorities?

In this white paper, we will review ways in which you can connect with physicians that advance health system priorities for providing timely, cost-effective care and enhancing the overall patient and physician experience. Having interviewed thousands of referring physicians across the country, Gelb has worked with many top-rated academic medical centers to strengthen relationships with physicians and improve physician experience.

The Strategic Importance of Physician Engagement

For the healthcare organization, this relationship building effort is of critical strategic importance and can serve to create physician advocates who support program strategy and operations in a manner that leads to creating mutually satisfying relationships with the referring physician community as well as with employed and affiliated medical staff.

In general, a physician engagement effort can provide the following benefits to the healthcare system:

- Increases organizational and physician awareness about physician relations programs and services that support referral relationships
- Improves physician satisfaction with the healthcare system
- Facilitates the system’s ability to compete favorably for patients seeking healthcare services
- Educates physician leadership about effective communication processes between the healthcare system and its referring provider practices
• Involves leadership and medical staff as organizational ambassadors to support physician relationship initiatives

**Physician Liaison Program**

Given the time constraints that face today’s physician community, there are opportunities for the physician liaison, as a surrogate for the physician, to create a regional, national and even international presence. Extending the reach of physician relationship processes requires innovative approaches to building relationships with physicians outside of the four walls of our hospitals and clinics, and providing them with the information and tools necessary to make informed referral decisions on behalf of their patients.

The role of the physician relations program and the physician liaisons is to serve as a representative or surrogate for the physicians, providing information and education related to a variety of referral sources. Some physicians do find time to go out on office visits with their liaisons, but most have competing priorities that require them to focus on caring for patients, conducting clinical research, publishing and presenting at medical society conferences and meetings.

Many organizations have established physician liaison programs to support these busy physicians, while engaging them in the process of physician relationship management. For existing programs there are continuing opportunities for enhancing effectiveness and operational efficiencies of the liaison team. For organizations who have not established, but are considering the physician liaison strategy, now is an opportune time to get started in developing a dedicated resource that can engage with and support your employed, affiliated and referring physician staff.

The traditional physician liaison approach is to employ an individual or team of liaisons whose primary role is to conduct office visits the organization’s medical staff and referring doctors. During these visits feedback from the physician is obtained about hospital and clinical operations, requests for information about medical services, facilities and access processes. The liaisons also provide a measure of customer service regarding difficult referrals or challenges with medical communications.

Where the office visit process may not be convenient for busy physicians, it is often preferable to engage physicians during medical society conferences they attend, either through an exhibit process or through the creation of physician advisory boards. Depending on the organization, one question to ask is: “Is the physician recognized for the time they spend with a physician liaison, for participating in a focus group, or for membership on a physician advisory board?” If not, this may represent a new opportunity for the liaison program to work within their organization to gain this level of recognition and encourages their active participation.
Engaging Busy Physicians

It is important for the healthcare system to develop physician (and scientist) level content that is timely and easy to access, and supports the system’s public image as a premier place to refer and admit patients. In our research, physicians typically request clinical and scientific level content that will assist them in providing patient education, while optimizing their decision making capabilities when a referral is medically indicated.

Priorities for content development, Web site navigation and structure should be based on patient and physician feedback through direct research, such as an experience mapping process. Insights can be gathered in group discussions and one-on-one interviews with these key stakeholders to provide the assessments and benchmark comparisons that will guide priorities for physician oriented content development.

Social Media

Physicians are rapidly adopting social media tools such as Twitter and LinkedIn as part of their approach to keeping up to date with the latest developments in healthcare. As the use of these digital tools becomes increasingly more commonplace, and mobile apps gain acceptance for supporting healthcare interactions, the physician liaison team can leverage social media to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of information and for providing easier and more direct access to the online tools that can help to hardwire their relationship with referring doctors and the medical staff.

These tools represent a unique opportunity for the health system to respond to the busy physician’s schedule. Consider a scenario where the health system’s physician liaison, skilled in the focused use of social media tools, and who understands the clinical and scientific needs and interests of a specific group of physicians, can direct clinically relevant content in small bursts that includes links back to the health system’s Web site or physician portal. This can facilitate education about specialized programs and services, clinical trials where applicable and easy to access pathways when a referral is needed.

Directories

It is known that physicians seek the best experience, outcomes and value when referring patients and coordinating their care. What is less often realized is that they also seek physician colleagues as a trusted resource and aim to identify their provider(s) of choice for particular disease types.

The clinical and scientific level content that resides physician directories serves assist physicians with identifying potential collaborators, specialists who can support referrals and coordination of care and providing consultation about difficult cases. Many of today’s online physician directories include brief videos introducing the physician as well as links to their publications and clinical trials for those involved in research activities.
The physician directories of the future need to serve not only as a reference guide or physician listing, not only as a placeholder for accessing clinical and scientific content, but also they should be operationally integrated as a component of the health system’s physician portal strategy, as well as patient access and scheduling processes.
About Endeavor

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm’s 50 year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor’s clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Gelb Consulting Group, a wholly owned subsidiary, monitors organizational performance and designs winning marketing strategies. Gelb helps organizations focus their marketing initiatives by fully understanding customer needs through proven strategic frameworks to guide marketing strategies, build trusted brands, deliver exceptional experiences and launch new products. Gelb can help you to develop and implement the right strategies. Using advanced research techniques, Gelb can help you to understand the complexities of your market, to develop your strategic decision frameworks and to determine the best deployment of your resources and technology to monitor your successes.

For over 50 years, Gelb has worked with marketing leaders on:

- Strategic Marketing
- Brand Building
- Customer Experience Management
- Go to Market
- Product Innovation
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