

Physician Relations Programs – Key Elements for Success

Today's healthcare environment is wrought with change, and the scales are tipping from physicians needing hospitals to hospitals needing physicians. The emergence of free-standing ambulatory care centers and multi-specialty clinics are providing physicians with increasing options for where to send their patients. As such, hospitals, need to make a concerted effort to effectively manage the increasingly critical relationship between the referring physician and the health system.



Facing these trends, hospitals and health systems must recognize that their focus needs to shift and center on the physician as a “must have” referral source. They need to work to keep the referrals base they have while also boosting referrals from new physicians. As many hospitals have learned, developing and executing a physician relations program is key to building and keeping a solid stream of business.

A physician relations program is not merely one employee with access to a physician directory and a pleasant demeanor. A successful and productive program requires a well-planned, well-executed,

and continual effort. In order to move the needle, hospitals need to understand their “customers” – their physician referral sources – and work to meet their needs. A hospital whose focus is on building a sustainable referral base must have an effective and proven model in place.

Successful physician relations programs have key components – proper set up, an effective sales strategy, and program evaluations, all of which are customized to the individual needs of the hospital – what are their present circumstances and future goals and what financial targets are they looking to achieve.

What Constitutes a Successful Program?

A successful physician relations program is not simply copying another hospital's model and expecting the same results. Effective programs are not cookie cutter, they are unique and shaped by the hospitals' individual objectives. A solid, well-planned, and properly executed program should have the following:

Complete support from hospital leadership

Achieving and maintain solid physician relations is not the sole responsibility of one department, but rather an organizational strategy. The support from leadership is important supporting physicians being on the road with the liaison building relationships.

Well defined and measurable objectives

There must exist a balanced approach to sales goals and referral targets. Spending too much time on the loyal physicians who already send all of their business and not enough time cultivating new referral streams can cause a program to fail.

Full system integration

Physician relations employees need to interface with all referral touchpoints within the organization from operations and the c-suite to marketing and the call center.

Access to market share and data analytics

Because the goal is to increase volumes and revenues by focusing on referral sources, having access to hospital data systems and/or outside market share software will allow the program to target the right referral sources and stay focused on the system strategy.

Effective encounters

When properly prepared, a representative can discern the needs of the physician, gain valuable market intelligence as well as identify and address any potential concerns or barriers.

Timely and consistent reporting

Program results should be reported to hospital leaders and other key stakeholders on a regular basis. This will demonstrate the success (or failure) of the program, identify key issues that require leadership attention, and keep up continued enthusiasm and resource support.



Ultimately, a well thought out and executed physician relations program nurtures referral relationships on an ongoing basis in order to continue to provide value and differentiate the hospital from its competition. With **proper planning**, **flexibility** to adjust to the ever-changing needs of the healthcare environment and the **cooperation** of the entire hospital, your physician relations program will be a success.