

The Evolving Chief Medical Officer Role

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Within the past decade the role of Chief Medical Officer (CMO) throughout the healthcare industry has expanded greatly. Previously the duties of this important leadership position centered around key functional areas such as oversight of physician services, physician recruitment, and medical staff affairs. In the past the specific knowledge and skills required of a CMO often focused on utilization management, cost containment, quality improvement, population health, referral retention, and improvement in patient experience.

While each of these areas remains important within the CMO leadership role, the position today is often responsible for bringing about transformational changes required to achieve superior strategic, clinical, and operational results in an evolving value-based care environment. The position now has oversight of even more critically important internal functions (such as, clinical integration, patient care data analytics, and proactive risk management) as well as external ones (such as, community relations, consumer education, and strategic partnerships) all of which are essential for success in value-based care.

Recently IPMA researched the following two key questions:

1. What CMO leadership capabilities and skills will become increasingly important for individual as well as organizational success?
2. What leadership traits best predict exceptional physician leadership performance?

Here are the highlights:

1. The CMO role is extraordinarily difficult and challenging. A very high bar is set to the intellectual, interpersonal, and overall strategic skills and personal talents necessary to successfully lead the organization through transformational change. The role requires not only a visionary/strategic planning mindset but also the ability to manage conflict among stakeholders while deepening the engagement of the clinical care teams. Successful system integration is often one of the most critical aspects of CMO leadership.

2. The importance of a collaborative leadership style versus command-and-control style is clear in the research. Physicians' desires for professional autonomy often run counter to the need to establish physicians as members of care teams.
3. The most critical CMO skill set is the ability to gain the trust of the various stakeholders, to demonstrate honesty and transparency in communications, and integrity in interactions. Above all, the CMO needs a clear understanding of how the organization functions currently and how it will need to evolve. The CMO will need to (a) align different (sometimes competing) constituencies (b) bridge silos and (c) manage cultural change.
4. Several interesting titles were expressed when describing an effective CMO, such as Chief Collaborator, Chief Educator, and Influencer in Chief. In the latter title impactful influence is realized through trustworthy engagement and an ability to effectively lead by example. The Chief Educator descriptor called for the CMO to be an agile learner committed to lifelong learning.
5. Several CMO job descriptions expressed the personal values needed for individual as well as organizational success: being collaborative, accountable, respectful, ethical, service driven and a servant leader.
6. Some CMO job descriptions were more "system results orientated" and emphasized the importance of setting clear direction, executing for results (such as meeting quality metric goals), and establishing relationships and influence among stakeholders to (a) inspire trust and followership, (2) lead the value transformation, and (3) foster system wide standards of care.
7. What leadership traits and skills predict exceptional physician leadership?
 - Self Confidence
 - Persistence
 - Decisiveness
 - Resiliency
 - Self-Awareness
 - Influence
 - Willingness to Share Praise and Success
 - Emotional Intelligence
 - Communications (including listening)
 - Conflict Management
 - Empathy
 - Team Building
 - Collaboration
 - Delegation
 - Strategic Thinking
 - Leading Change
 - Organizational Awareness
 - Innovation
 - Humility
8. Gold Standard Traits of a CMO: Being an effective educator, facilitator, communicator, negotiator, mentor, listener, and visionary.
9. The Advisory Board provides these insights on the physician leadership skills required in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous healthcare world. (The Board's description and the list below are not to be viewed as temporary conditions).

- Agile thinking
- Ability to manage continuous change: (Not just processes but complex human dynamics)
- Exceptional self-awareness
- Outward orientation: (Learning from other industries, organizations, and cultures)
- Ability to build an organization truly oriented to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion

10. What will physician leadership look like in the next 10 years?

“A new generation of physician leadership is required. One where there is deeper orientation on how everything fits together, such as technology, data, processes, and people.

Technological advancements will have tremendous impact on how care is delivered, and yet highly personalized care must be the focus. Leaders who demonstrate agility, flexibility, transparency, empathy, and a willingness to simplify things for everyone will perform best.”

~Sam Greengard - A look at the Future of Healthcare Leadership

We hope you found this brief research report of interest and look forward to discussing this matter with you further. Be assured the information included in this report is incorporated into our VISTA Physician Leadership Development Program, www.ipmameded.org/vista If you have questions, please contact Jim Coleman, jcoleman@ipmameded.org