

Aligning Community-Based Physicians

As the healthcare field continues to evolve with new models of care, a strategically based, formally organized physician liaison team can generate substantial dividends to any hospital or health system.

By Mike Slusarz

In today's highly dynamic marketplace, hospitals and health systems across the nation are realizing how important it is to cultivate, engage, and sustain strong relationships with physicians as our industry continues to transform.

As the healthcare marketplace continues to evolve and new models of care are developed, it becomes increasingly important for hospitals to create programs to maintain positive, interactive, and mutually beneficial relations with their medical staff. A strategically developed physician relations program will ensure a high level of physician satisfaction, drive volume, support the hospital's business development goals, and assist in the development of system-based programs to manage the health of populations.

Barnabas Health, New Jersey's largest health care system, with a medical staff that represents one-fifth of the state's practicing physicians, implemented a system-wide physician relations program in 2005. While the program has evolved over the years in response to local and industry-wide changes, it remains a vital element of our continued success.

Program Development

The creation of the Physician Liaison Program presented a unique opportunity to formalize a process to deliver key strategic messages directly to a receptive target audience. The program is driven from the system level with common metrics, segmentation programs, physician satisfaction benchmarks, and alignment strategies. However, it is customized for each of our individual acute care facilities, ambulatory surgery centers, outpatient facilities, and post-acute care providers based on their respective goals.

Several core principles provide the underlining factors for success, including a complete understanding of physician satisfaction drivers; real-time data; market-based

metrics; key messaging; online measurement tools; and access to, as well as, support from the C-suite.

Program Basics

An organized approach to creating a physician relations program is the key to success and ensures consistency in effort and policy making. Starting with a defined program structure with clear guidelines, goals, and rules will help empower staff to make the necessary decisions that are prompt and in the best interests of the hospital and its relationships with its medical staff.

At Barnabas Health, we found over the years that there are many elements to a successful program; but the following should be part of any initial endeavor.

- Staffing—Decide if new staff will be hired or existing resources be used.
- Research—Create a research strategy that sets a benchmark for physician satisfaction.
- Targets—Choose your targeted physicians based on service line growth, geography, specialty mix, and referral patterns.

Exhibit 1. A Measure of Success

The table below represents a comparative analysis of physician satisfaction metrics based on a state-wide physician satisfaction survey conducted by Bruno & Ridgway Research, Inc. in 2010 and 2012. The baseline scores were developed in 2010. The results in this table indicate the percentage improvement in physician satisfaction scores in 2012 compared to 2010.

Physician Satisfaction Improvement at Barnabas Health, 2010–2012

Metrics examined in surveys	% increase
Communication between you and the hospital administration	22%
Degree to which hospital administration has positioned the hospital to deal with changes in the healthcare environment	13%
Degree to which this hospital has enhanced your practice	9%
Overall satisfaction with facility	9%
Likelihood you would recommend facility to patients	9%
Would you recommend this facility to other physicians	8%
Degree to which facility makes caring for your patients easier	7%
Quality of care at this facility	5%
Degree to which facility provides timely clinical information	5%

- Communication and education—Schedule and plan logistics for regular communication activities.
- Measurement—Develop tools such as monthly performance dashboards, physician satisfaction studies, and monthly volume indicators by service line.
- Web-based solutions—Track and report on physician liaison activity.

Physician Communication

Our program began with the creation of a baseline physician satisfaction study. After surveying more than 850 members of our medical staff, we concluded that the key drivers of satisfaction included the ability to improve communication and responsiveness; timely notification of changes; and openness to physician involvement in program development.

We learned early that each hospital liaison program could address communication challenges through a liaison model built on practice support and issue resolution. While there are other models, we believed our best investment would be in aligning more closely with our medical staff in terms of communication, relationship building, program development, patient/office staff education, and timely reporting.

Bear in mind that the physician should not be your only point of contact. Relationships should also be cultivated and maintained with office staff, many of whom have great influence in the decisions made by the practice.

At Barnabas Health, we created an innovative, leading-edge best practice eight years ago to align our office managers through an Office Managers Association
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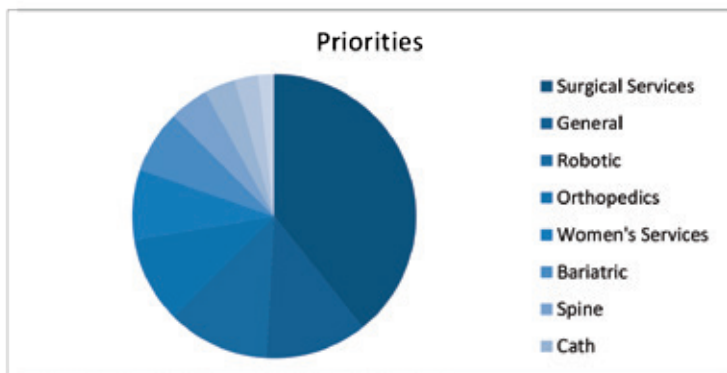
Key Elements in Building Physician Relationships

- Timely Communications
- Responsiveness
- Engagement
- Practice Solutions
- Technology recommendations
- Knowledge of Hospital Resources
- Business Development

Exhibit 2. Example of a Monthly Dashboard

Barnabas Health

Barnabas Health Management Services
Date range: **March 2014**

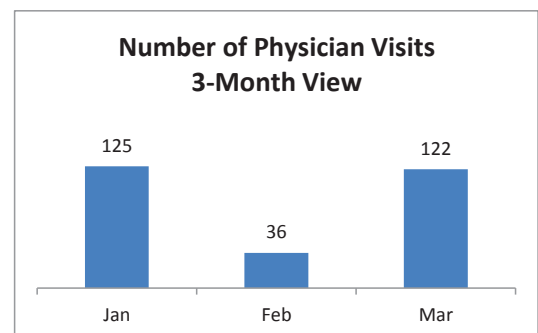


Physician Specific

Initial Unscheduled Visit	32
Follow-Up Unscheduled	31
Initial Scheduled Visit	24
Follow-Up Scheduled	20
Phone Call/E-mail	10
Event	4
Office Manager Event	1
Grand Total	122

Initiative Specific Details

Discussion Topics - Top 10	# of Discussions
Surgical Services	44
General	13
Robotic	13
Orthopedics	11
Women's Services	9
Bariatric	8
Spine	5
Cath	4
Sleep Center/EEG	3
Gyn/Onc	2





SHSMD Datebook

March 3–4
Executive Dialogue
Amelia Island, FL

October 11–14
SHSMD Connections 2015,
SHSMD's Annual Educational
Conference and Exhibits
Washington, DC

For other news and updates on upcoming professional development opportunities, go to www.shsmd.org.

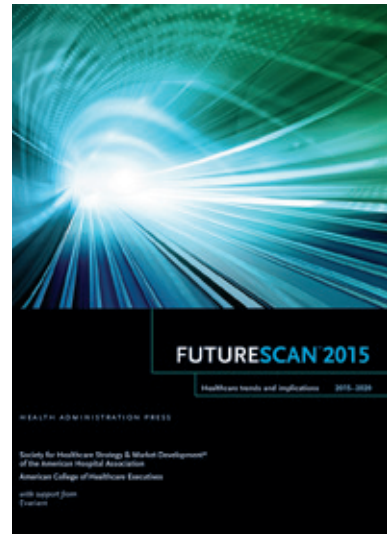
SHSMD Advantage

Highlighting the benefits of membership

Futurescan 2015: Healthcare Trends and Implications 2015–2020

Developed by SHSMD and the American College of Healthcare Executives, this annual environmental assessment delivers insights and predictions that will help guide your organization's strategic planning for years to come. In *Futurescan 2015*, a panel of industry thought leaders addresses eight key issues regarding healthcare change and transformation:

- Developing more cost-effective delivery systems
- Seizing opportunities for transparency
- Addressing the decline in reimbursement
- Choosing a strategy for value-based competition
- Achieving effective ambulatory-hospital integration
- Gauging the impact of private insurance exchanges



- Implementing advanced care planning
- Adopting individualized medicine

SHSMD members receive one complimentary copy per membership year. (Members as of December 2014 will be mailed a copy of *Futurescan 2015* in January.) Make the most of this popular publication by visiting www.shsmd.org/futurescan15 to order additional copies for your leadership team.

Aligning Community

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program. Today, the program has more than 1,000 participating managers. We built a micro-site where association members can access system-wide forms, EHR information, educational programs, health library content, and support services, and ask questions related to pertinent industry issues or their local facility.

Involve Others

Your physicians and liaison team should not be the only groups aware of your program and its goals. Staff throughout the hospital must also support your program and embrace their role in creating and maintaining positive relationships with your medical staff. Hospital leadership must maintain a dialogue with your medical staff that taps into their knowledge and gives them a voice in your facility's strategic growth initiatives.

Metrics and Measurement

The way you measure the progress and success of your program will depend on the size of your hospital or health system, the number of physicians you chose to track, and the overall amount of resources you dedicate to the project. However, the most important thing to remember is that you cannot accurately measure your success without gathering pre-launch data and using the results to create dashboards and benchmarks against which future data is interpreted.

Several measures can be used to evaluate your liaison team, including the number of office visits or contacts, the percentage of scheduled appointments, the topics discussed, the specialties visited, the percentage of physicians with back-office numbers, and physician profiles completed in your call center as well as your online physician locator.

Long-term metrics may include call center or online-directed referral growth

rates with new patient referrals to selected service lines. Also, in today's dynamically changing environment, outpatient and ambulatory surgery volume should be measured and any new changes in splitter activity, physician acquisitions, or new physician development.

As our industry continues to evolve with new models of care, a strategically based, formally organized physician liaison team can generate substantial dividends to any hospital or health system. Your team can provide the market intelligence to build partnerships, adjust to competitive challenges, and enhance long-standing relationships with your medical staff, ensuring the continued success of your organization.

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