



WHITE PAPER

Five Ways Physicians Can Better Communicate With Staff

Effective physician leaders are effective communicators. They express themselves well both orally and in writing. Further, they project an image of self-assurance and of understanding. These attributes are continuously communicated by their actions and demeanor.

Effective communication is also important because a large portion of a physician's time is spent communicating with others. A physician's day is filled with face-to-face communications with patients, patients' families, employees, and referring physicians.

Here are five ways physicians can improve their communication skills when interacting with staff:

1. Be open and approachable. Physician leaders must communicate an aura of approachability. If they do not, their employees will be reluctant to tell them of potentially dangerous situations because of their fear of harsh rebuke or excessive punishment.

As a leader, physicians don't only lead; they must also stay open and listen. Put people at ease and listening intently when communicating with team members. Ensure to make eye contact, smile, and ask open ended questions.

2. Focus on clarity. People cannot be led if they cannot understand what the leader says, means, or expects. There is no place for ambiguity in practice management. Clear direction is a critical dimension of practice climate. When people understand the mission, values, standards, and expectations of the practice, they can do what needs to be done. Lack of such understanding leads to false starts, ineptness, and discontent.

3. Explain your reasoning. When communication is effectively used, people do not feel like pawns. Rather, they understand and subscribe to the goals and values of the practice and feel empowered, not dominated. When the reasons for orders are not apparent, the likelihood of the orders being disregarded increases.

4. Take the quality and sanctity of communication seriously. Physicians can share information with staff through regularly scheduled meetings. They can inform team members of upcoming events so people can plan ahead. Even trivial rumors must be squelched, as the transmission of accurate information is vital.

5. Pay attention to reactions. One thing great communicators have in common is their heightened sense of situational and contextual awareness; they are great listeners and astute in their observations. When they talk to team members, outstanding physician leaders watch the expressions of those in the audience to be sure they are taking in what is being said. Where there is any doubt, physicians must ensure understanding by making a clearer restatement or requesting that an employee repeat the message in his own words. Important oral communications are sometimes followed up in writing to ensure uptake and understanding.

It might seem easy, but communicating effectively actually takes quite a bit of finesse. George Bernard Shaw is quoted as having said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Indeed the office can often be rocky due to poor communication.

Effective communication is a necessity for positive and productive workplace interactions. Becoming a more effective communicator will not only make your employees more motivated and productive, but will also have a positive effect on your practice environment.

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