

# Evolving Roles for Physician Leaders

The chief medical officer as a partner for the chief of staff **By Susan Reynolds, MD, PhD**

**T**HE ROLE of Chief Medical Officer in a hospital or health system has evolved. Originally, the CMO primarily served as a liaison between hospital administration and the medical staff. Now the CMO is a vital part of the executive suite, overseeing quality, patient safety, and medical staff affairs. With payment reform now linking reimbursement to quality, the CMO can have a major impact on revenue and often has line item authority over budgetary matters.

The Chief of Staff is elected by the medical staff to represent its members to the hospital board and administration. A Chief of Staff reports to the board. However, the CMO is hired by the hospital and reports to the CEO, and gives input to the board and the C-suite from a physician executive's perspective.

There aren't enough hours in a day for a Chief of Staff to handle all the challenges that medical staff members face. The medical staff oversees credentialing and privileging as well as peer review. A CMO usually oversees Medical Staff Services and therefore can assist the Chief of Staff by making sure credentials files are complete before they are presented to the Credentials Committee. The CMO can also make

sure the medical staff bylaws are followed and legal input is obtained if quality concerns are raised.

Stress and burnout among physicians is on the rise. Disruptive behavior is becoming more apparent, in spite of the Joint Commission's "Zero Tolerance" standard. Such behavior must be dealt with appropriately, and CMOs have time and experience to provide such support to the Chief of Staff.

More than half of CMOs now hold advanced degrees, which include education about quality metrics, patient safety, finance and budgeting, and population health management. Not only can such CMOs support the Chief of Staff and the Medical Executive Committee, but they can also assure that hospital goals pertaining to the medical staff are met.

An effective leader removes obstacles so that followers can succeed. The CMO can often be an obstacle remover for the hospital's elected physician leaders. Collaboration is essential so that physician leaders who are either elected or hired achieve their objectives together.

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