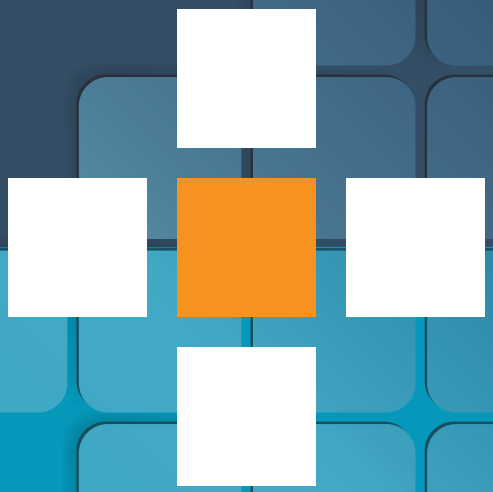
How a Physician Liaison Delivers a Competitive Advantage

The value that a physician liaison delivers depends on the foundation of your overall strategic growth program.

Once you have prioritized your strategic goals – and have the strong pillars of systems, data and people – in place, you can expect rapid and measurable growth in service line revenue, network optimization and physician retention.

Tiller-Hewitt HealthCare Strategies works with healthcare organizations that want their leaders to consistently deliver strategic growth and measurable results.



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How a Physician Liaison Delivers a Competitive Advantage

By Tammy Tiller-Hewitt, CEO of Tiller-Hewitt HealthCare Strategies

Many hospitals and medical groups can point to the individual or office labeled "physician relations." Often, their focus is more reactive in nature – a place where members of the medical staff bring issues. That is a common model for internally built programs. In many cases, the program is missing the measurable value and benefits of a strategically built program. In contrast, a best-practice, professional Physician Liaison/Outreach Program is strategic, data-driven and proactive with all outreach efforts to support the organization's strategic objectives.

Ask yourself:

- Does our physician liaison and professional outreach program position our organization clearly ahead of our competition?
- Are we proving it by showing measurable results in growth and retention?
- Are we confident that our key physicians and physician groups are fully engaged, maximizing their potential and are not at risk for leakage?

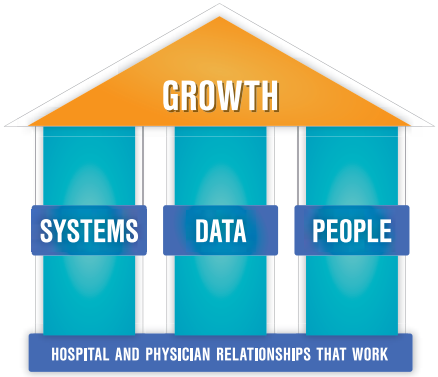
Your answer might be, "of course!" But, if you inspected the foundation of your program today, would you find it is strong enough to continuously improve your providers' level of trust, satisfaction, engagement and ultimately, your financial performance?

Begin with the End in Mind – The Goal of a Physician Liaison Program

Our Physician Liaison Value and Compensation Survey showed that this role goes by many names including physician liaison, physician-hospital relations, physician outreach and business development. The title isn't as important as the reporting relationship with a senior leader and effectiveness in achieving measurable goals in five key areas:

- Grow Market Share *Strategically*
- Identify and Reduce Outmigration (Leakage)
- Strengthen Provider Alignment and Engagement
- Effective Onboarding & Navigation of New Providers for Rapid Ramp-up and Long-term Retention
- Prepare Providers for Multiple Care Models - Including Value Based Care

Launching a Strategic Physician Liaison Program



Successful physician liaison programs work in organizations of any type and size, from physician practice organizations to academic medical centers, and from small critical access hospitals to national health systems. In fact, national teams have been implemented simultaneously. Regardless of size scope, they have this in common: their programs are built on three pillars: 1) the right systems, 2) the right data and 3) the right people.

The Right Systems: The Foundation for Accountability

The concept that "systems permit ordinary people or organizations to achieve extraordinary results predictably," has been repeatedly proven in healthcare. Without systems, even your extraordinary organization will find it difficult to predictably achieve even ordinary results. Dysfunction and waste most often occur when there is either a) no system or b) duplicate systems for achieving the same objective.

A key benefit of the physician liaison role is that it shows physicians respect of their time and talent by understanding and eliminating obstacles that cause physicians to limit their engagement – or worse - avoid your organization altogether!

Assessing your program, using best practice models, gives you a jump start for early success. By orienting an assessment toward process improvement with a strategic growth objective. Building in accountability by defining priorities, clearly assigning responsibilities, setting milestones and scheduling firm dates for reporting to leadership start identifying key success factors.

This systematic approach to strategic growth works. For example, one physician outreach team at a newly formed regional network rapidly identified several strategic network growth and alignment opportunities and some related challenges to access and throughput. They completed comprehensive on-site training, data collection and collateral development. Using LEAN methods to ensure access and capacity, they then launched growth teams in key strategic service lines. The team delivered double digit incremental increases in the first year by significantly improving network communication and collaboration with physicians and their staffs.

The Right Data and Insights: The Navigation System for Growth

With universal electronic health record adoption, data tracking and analysis tools are proliferating. But data without insight is just a bunch of numbers.

Timely, relevant data provides the opportunity to measure and reduce business leakage and identify opportunities for new growth. Data-driven insights support strategic direction and will enable you to identify targets, tiers and trends, and then make decisions about where to best apply resources.

Context is key: one hospital CEO admitted he actually enjoys reviewing his weekly physician-hospital relations report. Although he frequently speaks with his team throughout the week, the report his director of physician outreach delivers each Friday brings fragmented feedback into focus.

10 SUCCESS FACTORS

1. Program Structure & Internal Collaboration – Structure the program so the liaison can affect change as a strategic representative of leadership and a partner in uncovering and responding to issues.
2. Training/Education – Learning never stops in this role. Ongoing training ensures the liaison's skills and knowledge of strategic initiatives remain sharp.
3. Access – One of the most common barriers to growth is ACCESS! Improve access to key services lines with effectively facilitated LEAN teams and events.
4. Strategic Focus – Routinely confirm the organization's strategic plan to keep efforts laser-focused on strategic growth.
5. Stakeholder Involvement & Buy-In – This includes building accountability systems to ensure that C-Suite and key department leaders are consistently closing the loop on issues and opportunities.
6. Referral Data Availability & Utilization – Referral data from an internal EHR can offer insights into the quality and quantity of referrals coming in to the organization as well as those leaking out.
7. Market Intelligence Challenges/ Opportunities – Consistent and frequent provider calls, along timely claims data, gives a more complete picture of you provider relationships and the competition.
8. PRM Effectiveness & Utilization – Choose a physician relations management product that make it easy to monitor, measure and report activity, issues and outcomes.
9. Collaterals/Marketing – Assess the organization's arsenal of marketing collaterals and referral tools that make referring to the organization as easy as possible.
10. Path of Least Resistance – Always revisit ways that the organization can win business simply by being hassle free and easier for patients and providers to work with.

An assessment or routine should also involve a leadership ride-along component with the outreach or liaison team. The "ride-along" is also critical for gathering insight: when was the last time you accompanied your physician outreach team in the field to visit your physicians? Join your liaison in the field and you get a front row seat in gaining a better perspective of the road blocks, rough terrain and realities that physicians and their office staff experience every single day.

If you prefer to avoid challenging encounters with physicians – or you think you don't have the time to ride along – then re-think your outreach system. Your liaison's job is to ensure your visits are well-planned and productive. If your liaison invites you to meet with a dis-engaged physician – that is not a sign of failure. It is an opportunity to show your commitment and do something that may be more effective.

The side bonus: Any given day in the field provides an opportunity to uncover a tremendous amount of competitive intelligence. So why would anyone miss this opportunity?

The Right People: Hardwiring for Successful Execution

Put systems and data-driven insights in the hands of the right people, and they will produce extraordinary results. But you must form a team of professionally trained liaisons, committed service line managers and engaged senior leaders to tackle a specific growth objective for a strategic service line.

The most effective programs identify, hire and train liaisons with the right business acumen, personal attributes and attitude to be effective in the field, with their colleagues in operations and with leadership. The liaison is accountable for breaking down the silos between hospital operations, physician relations, recruitment and retention, marketing and physician practice administration. Based on the liaison's direct reporting relationship with senior leadership, they become the catalyst for effective collaboration, transparency and accountability for achieving the organization's strategic goals for growth.

A strong liaison will demonstrate to physicians that your organization is hearing, committing resources and implementing solutions that meet their needs with a healthy sense of urgency, higher-value solutions and supporting data.

Risks and Rewards - Successful Implementation of a Physician Liaison Program

Like high quality care and service excellence, physician relations and engagement provide a critical competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining the best providers. When launching or re-launching a physician liaison program there are significant risks and rewards that should be considered.

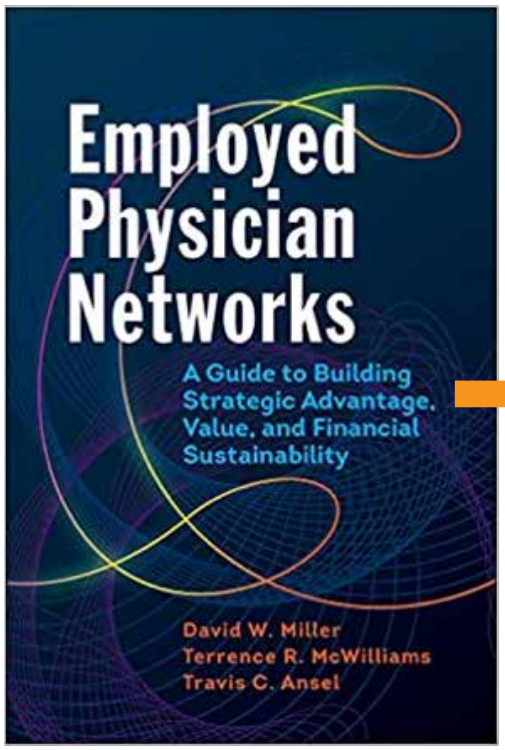
Because "first impressions last," the greatest risk is in rolling out a liaison program that is simply about grabbing the medical staff roster and sending the liaison out to "make the doctors happy" on a scattered or reactive basis.

The communication gap between leadership and physicians is already too wide and growing. It underscores the importance of structuring a professional liaison program that will improve engagement, versus deploying a detail person who is not prepared with data, consultative needs-based sales training, and a clear understanding of – and laser focus on – each strategic initiative.

The rewards of the well-structured, professionally staffed physician liaison program are seen in the value delivered to your provider. Once you have prioritized your strategic goals, and have the strong pillars of systems, data and people in place, you can expect to see return on investment that is both rapid and measurable:

- Immediate results from incremental strategic growth in referrals
- Quick response to timely and relevant market intelligence
- Enhanced provider engagement and retention
- Greater value-driven reimbursement through higher engagement in population health initiatives

As featured in: *Employed Physician Networks: A Guide to Building Strategic Advantage, Value and Financial Sustainability.*



Key Area 5: Pursuing Growth Through Market Intelligence

The network, regardless of phase, must remain open to strategic growth opportunities and identify community needs and market opportunities. Community needs change, sometimes abruptly, with changing demographics and market resources. The network must remain flexible to anticipate and meet changing circumstances. Market intelligence is the key to identifying opportunities and avoiding missteps. Active involvement in the community and listening to informal feedback from community members are helpful in collecting market information.

Relationship liaison (or physician liaison) programs are formal programs designed to proactively develop and strengthen the network's professional relationships. The heart of the program is a specially trained individual who understands your business and possesses a personal skill set for cultivating relationships. Usually, such programs focus externally, to enhance referral relationships and develop business opportunities, but liaison activities should go beyond extolling the network's capabilities. They should provide real-time data and information on network strengths, weaknesses, and marketplace changes that offer growth opportunities or could detrimentally affect key services. This information allows the network to consistently meet changing market needs and to remain the provider of choice.

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Tiller-Hewitt Healthcare Strategies designs and executes high-performance programs that drive strategic service line revenue and market share, network optimization, and physician retention for hundreds of health systems, hospitals, population health, and provider organizations nationwide.

We deliver rapid, measurable return on investment by working as partners with leadership, operations and physician outreach teams to hardwire a collaborative culture and build strong programs on the Tiller-Hewitt Pillars: Systems, Data and People.

Learn more at www.tillerhewitt.com, (866) 651-8701 or info@tillerhewitt.com.