



3-minute case study: A leadership social network

By Lia Novotny | February 9, 2017

The problem

Piedmont Healthcare needed to build its ranks of physician leaders. While well-versed in clinical skills, some physicians would benefit from training in communication and collaboration skills. The organization also needed to reconcile the goals and priorities of its physician and administrative leaders, says John W. Henson, IV, M.D., Piedmont's chief of oncology – balancing a spirit of experimentation against an aversion to risk.

The solution

The Georgia-based health system found a single solution to both challenges: The R. Timothy Stack Piedmont Leadership Academy, or PLA. Crossing the medical-administrative divide, the program trains physicians in non-clinical leadership skills. And it teaches administrative leaders how doctors approach problems.

The two-year course has a selective admissions process, accepting 20 physicians and 20 administrators in each cohort. The curriculum focuses on the practical skills of running meetings: active listening,

leading committees with disruptive members, getting buy-in despite disparate opinions, understanding different perspectives, and deepening self-understanding.

While these practical skills are strengthened, simply bringing together physicians and administrators to learn side-by-side delivers broader benefits to participants – and has a lasting impact on the organization.

The outcomes

1. Crossing the administrative-medical divide

In teaching physicians and administrators together, Piedmont gains more than new leaders skilled in running productive meetings. The program also builds bridges. It helps administrators think like physicians – or at least understand where physicians are coming from. After the program, Henson says, they're more willing to take a "design thinking" approach to leadership and administration, "to innovate and prototype while still avoiding inordinate risk."

2. Building a leadership social network

Cohort members stay in touch and work better together long after the completion of the course. Henson says he does a significant amount of work through the relationships he formed in PLA. “You can accomplish a lot by forming a social network around leadership,” he says.

And strong physician leadership, according to the athenahealth Physician Leadership and Engagement Index, can result in as much as a fourfold increase in physician engagement at all levels of the organization.

Lia Novotny is a regular contributor to athenaInsight.



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