

Data confirms: Leaders, physician burnout is on you

By Chris Hayhurst | April 3, 2019

The more satisfied physicians are with the leadership at their organizations, the more likely they are to feel empowered to do their jobs.

Similarly, doctors across all practice specialties who say that they're happy with those at the helm are more engaged at work, have greater job satisfaction, and are far less apt to experience signs of burnout than those who express dissatisfaction with their leadership.

These are just a few of the findings in athenahealth's recent survey of approximately 1,400 physicians. To measure how doctors felt about their leadership, survey participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following two statements: "The leaders of my organization are the best people to lead us over the next 5-10 years," and "Communication within my practice is

open and candid." Individual physicians' responses about leadership and communication were then compared to their assessments of "capability," engagement, and other metrics.

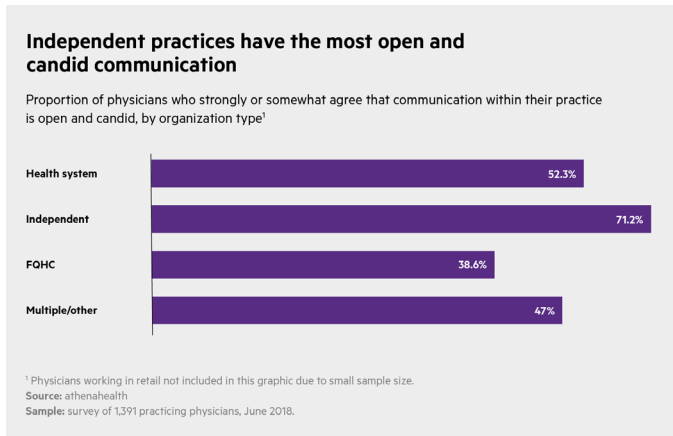
51% of physicians surveyed believe their leaders are the best people to lead over the next 5-10 years

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?
"The leaders of my organization are the best people to lead us over the next 5-10 years"



Sources: athenahealth
Sample: survey of 1,391 practicing physicians, June 2018.

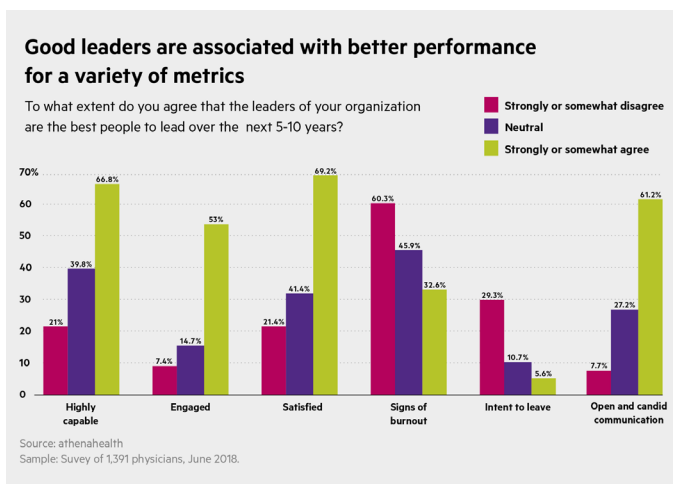
Overall, slightly more than half of those surveyed believe their current leaders are well-positioned to continue leading their organization in the coming years, while 63% say that communication at their practice tends to be open and candid.



Physicians in independent practices, the survey found, are happiest with their leadership (64%) and enjoy the highest rates of open communication (71%). Those in health systems, on the other hand, are more likely to be dissatisfied with their leadership and to disagree that their workplace environment is one in which communication is open and candid.

When leadership “has your back”

The survey results also highlight the impact of strong leadership and open communication on metrics such as physician satisfaction.



Physicians who like their current leadership feel twice as capable, and are more than six times as likely to feel engaged, than those who aren't satisfied. They're also twice as likely to be satisfied with their jobs, and 45% less likely to show signs of burnout.

Joseph Frolkis, M.D., Ph.D., president and chief executive officer of New England Quality Care Alliance (NEQCA), a network of approximately 1,800 affiliated physicians practicing in 13 “local care organizations” in eastern Massachusetts, says he's not surprised by the findings. “The healthcare world is changing so rapidly, especially with this movement from ‘volume to value’ and the embrace of population health management and prevention. To adapt and succeed, it's important to have leadership you know is going to have your back.”

With that in mind, Frolkis says, in 2018 NEQCA launched what it calls its “NEQCA Leadership Academy.” The six-session program for emerging clinical and administrative leaders in the NEQCA network includes one-day courses on everything from financial stewardship to physician resiliency. Clinicians who complete the series receive continuing medical education credits – but more importantly, Frolkis says, they learn the skills they need to earn their colleagues' respect and trust.

“I think that's really key right now,” says Frolkis. “If you have credibility and you're trusted within your organization, people are going to listen and come along with you when you challenge them to change. These changes should also reduce professional burnout and job dissatisfaction, he says, “and hopefully set your practice up for success.”

Chris Hayhurst is a frequent contributor to athenaInsight.

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