Organizational Socialization Of Physicians Entering A Complex Healthcare System

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Introduction

This research presents compelling data supporting a comprehensive organizational socialization program for physicians entering a medical group practice and fills a void in the literature about improving the process whereby physicians can more effectively enter a medical group. As far back as 1999 (Bender et al.), a scholarly study noted that physicians joining the Mayo Clinic physician group took up to five years to be fully integrated into the medical group. Further research was called for, yet no scholarly studies on organizational socialization of physicians into a medical group have been reported. Unlike medical science, in which double-blind studies are the gold standard for proving a hypothesis of care, double-blind studies are essentially impossible to conduct in the social sciences. However, what can sometimes be identified are patterns of behavior that although failing the rigor of a double-blind study can be helpful in decision making when it comes to individual and group behavior. It is in that spirit that I conducted an exploratory case study. In the midst of a challenging year of conversion to an electronic medical record, the survey had a 35% response rate with compelling comments on the effects of the program. The study suggests that the organizational socialization program provided those queried a clearer understanding of the complexities of a large integrated medical group. The program also provided specific actionable skills that were applied in day to day work. The study also supports a much earlier integration into a large medical group in contradistinction to the Mayo Clinic study. This study is important because of the lack of research in the area of organizational socialization of physicians into large medical groups.

Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of an organizational socialization (Schein,1968) program for new physicians who enter a large medical group practice. I sought to discover if a formal organizational socialization program had a positive effect on relationship building, intention to stay, satisfaction, and integration into a medical group by analyzing the responses from an open-ended 10 question qualitative survey. Six physician cohorts (277 physicians) who completed a 54 hour organizational socialization program over nine months were surveyed yielding nearly 1,000 cells of data that were analyzed for patterns and outcomes. Using an open-ended survey to capture the words of participants helped me to understand responses to this specific program. Future research may be quantitative based on the understanding from this qualitative research. **Group coaching** consisted of short didactic sessions followed by small group activities. The Socratic method of stimulating small group activities was used. Intergroup report outs stimulated more discussion and individual "learnings" were solidified. At the end of each meeting participants were encouraged to contact me for individual issues not suitable for group discussion. **Individual coaching** followed in these cases as needed.

Results

Post program representative individual survey responses

- "I take ownership, become involved in more than just seeing patients."
- **"Better understanding and faster assimilation into the Kaiser Permanente (KP) culture."**
- "I see myself as integrated with the physician group and feel that I behave with a sense of belonging and ownership here in the medical group."
- **"I know how to build bridges with physicians from other services that normally we would not have contact with."**
- "I have better communication skills and ability to listen to my colleagues instead of just talking. I have better ability to talk to my staff with both positive and negative news, and know the best way to deal with difficult conversations."
- **"I have a comfort level with my role and have positive interactions with my colleagues."**
- "I am overall satisfied with the work and feel that I have a hand in correcting/changing things as I see it."
- **"Getting to know more new physicians and not feeling isolated in the new position."**
- "The fact that KP would invest time and money in such a program made me feel valued and appreciated."
- **"I have a much better understanding of the structure and hierarchy of the many layers of personnel and the scope of this large group. I was not overwhelmed as I may well have been otherwise."**
- "Just having a program dedicated to educating our new physicians is a message already that our organization invests in our new people and want to help each of us succeed."
- **"Getting to know other physicians was a huge plus and understanding how KP works also was important."**
- "Rapidly developing a network of colleagues/friends from my class at the new physician program and realizing my leadership potential"

Post program cumulative observations

- **96.4 %** affirmed that the program had a positive impact on satisfaction with their position in KPOC.
- **97% reported being completely engaged in their workplace.**
- **51%** of participants indicated that they saw themselves as engaged in leadership although not having an official leadership title.
- **91% Ninety-one percent of respondents were happy with their positions**
- **63%** of the participants reported seeing behavior in other physicians that did not model the desired behavior discussed in the program
- **89% of participants said the socialization program contributed to their current positive opinion of the workplace**
- **Only 11%,** or 8 out of 74 respondents, said the program did not contribute to their current satisfaction with their position

Examples of specific problem solving skills gained

- "I learned how to have a difficult conversation with a colleague or other members of the healthcare team."
- **"The listening skills, leadership skills, and analytical skills I learned during the program helped me better deal with situations."**
- "I learned how to be a better mediator. How to help resolve conflict; doing this without making the other person feel bad."
- **"Learning to identify your allies and then increasing the emotional bank account has allowed me to build great working relationships with staff, admin, and colleagues."**

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Discussion

Organizational socialization has been described as effective when newcomers move from being outsiders to insiders. Indicators of insider status include feeling like part of the organization; understanding the political structure of the organization; understanding how to get things accomplished without causing major disruptions; and adopting the company's mission, goals, and values. If these indicators are present, it is likely that newcomers will have less confusion about their place in the organization and be less likely to leave (Fogarty, 2000). The overall goal of this study was to assess effectiveness of an organizational socialization program for new physicians entering a complex health care organization. Based on the results of this study, it appears that a formal and detailed organizational socialization program (enculturation) yields very positive results in accomplishing for physicians what has been reported for other groups in the scholarly literature. Since previous scholarly studies regarding organizational socialization for physicians were not found in the literature, I decided to do an initial qualitative study with open ended questions to better understand what participants were thinking after the program. Quantitative studies are planned for future research.

Conclusions

Effective organizational socialization enhances at least three attributes of an organization member's life: improved job satisfaction, improved commitment to the organization, and decreased likelihood of leaving the organization. Research has established a relationship between physician satisfaction and patient satisfaction. Organizational socialization programs have been shown to lead to higher job satisfaction (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2002) in non-physician employee programs, but the literature does not include any organizational socialization studies with physician subjects. This study fills that gap. With the large-scale changes under way in the business paradigm of physician practices, optimizing entry into a medical group is crucial. **If physicians have higher job satisfaction, there likely will be happier physicians and patients, less disruptive behavior and better intragroup interactions.** Health care reform is now a reality. To succeed, complex medical groups are forming. Organizational socialization programs like the one in this study can be beneficial in the entry of physicians into any group setting.