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Healthcare Leaders May Find Soft Skills Hardest Amid Times of Change

FROM THE EDITOR: DANIEL R. VERDON

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AS PAYERS SHIFT COSTS TO CONSUMERS AND AS LAWMAKERS ATTEMPT TO REPOSITION HEALTH CARE FOR THE FUTURE, THE INDUSTRY IS UNDERGOING A METAMORPHOSIS.

The importance of high-quality communication in health care may even be magnified if you consider the scope of what must be communicated. In an article titled "Communication Strategies for Spreading Changes," the Institute for Healthcare Improvement highlights seven proven communication strategies:^a

Consider the trends: the proliferation of narrow networks, the birth of a new level of consumerism, the broad use of care coordinators by providers and payers, the advancement of telehealth, the shortage of primary care physicians, the growth of retail medicine, the ongoing quest for interoperability of electronic health records—and the list goes on. Collectively, the trends are profoundly transformative. Such trends are why soft-leadership skills will take on even greater importance. Yet these skills are sometimes the hardest to employ consistently during a period of great change.



In this issue, Mark Madden outlines 10 "Soft-Leadership Competencies for Today's Healthcare Finance Executives." His message: Leaders with a clear vision, agility, courage and passion, and an ability to inspire, communicate, and drive results will be needed during health care's transition. Every healthcare leader must possess these skills to achieve lasting change.

- Care team or unit-level meetings
- Person-to-person contact
- Visits to high-performing sites
- Groups of individuals with similar jobs and interests who form communities of practice
- Small-group conference calls
- Online chat or discussion groups
- Telephone hotlines that connect experts with adopters

When it comes to this new healthcare economy, the nidus of change has to extend beyond healthcare settings to influence, inspire, and facilitate lasting lifestyle changes for the U.S. population. The healthcare industry not only is undergoing major shifts in its makeup and delivery, but also is being asked to help change the behavior of a population to fight risks associated with preventable chronic conditions. Healthcare costs of such conditions are in the billions and, if left unchecked, will continue to skyrocket, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.^b Behavioral change is complicated further by a cadre of factors, including socioeconomics, education, attitudes, age, and addiction.

In the new healthcare economy, lifestyle change will be influenced by every encounter and during every visit. And this system needs to empower health care to treat, heal, and educate-and receive payment for delivering society's most valuable services.

Footnotes

a. “Communication Strategies for Spreading Changes,” The Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

b. “Chronic Diseases: The Leading Cause of Death and Disability in the United States.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 9, 2014.

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