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Help Wanted: Population Health Physician Leaders

Filling positions may be a tall order; job-getters will enjoy top-of-license roles

By JULIE PARKER

Finding presentable candidates for population health physician leaders is a tall order, especially since many doctors remain unfamiliar with the new paradigm in post-healthcare reform.

Personnel represents one of three key ingredients to implementing population health management. It's the glue to connecting data and the changing nature of the overall healthcare experience. The hard shift in practice management has healthcare organizations scrambling to secure top-notch population health physician leaders, a move that keeps physician recruiters like those at Jordan Search Consultants quite busy.

"Our clients know the organizations able to most effectively aggregate and distribute data—to collaborators, team members, and even patients themselves—will succeed," said Kathy Jordan, president of Jordan Search Consultants. "Healthcare systems are now implementing robust software systems and population health management programs that help automate data integration, analysis, reporting, and communications so that real-time evaluations—and adjustments in patient care plans—can be made instantaneously. Having the right IT systems—and IT personnel—in place is critical to advance clinical outcomes, improve care, and lower costs. Organizations with the ability to master data control and predictive analytics to generate decision-driving insights will succeed in population health

management."

Unfortunately, the shortage of primary care physicians (PCPs)—the leaders of population health management—continues to escalate. As population health management becomes the dominant healthcare model, the demand for their roles will be unprecedented.

"As physicians continue to leave the private practice model in favor of employed physician models, cultural fit within an organization will become a key recruitment parameter," said Regina Levison, vice president of client development for Jordan Search Consultants. "In addition, PCPs will be recruited based on their ability to build consensus, manage teams, and lead a diverse care team to better patient health. Organizations must understand what physicians are looking for clinically, financially, and administratively to ensure a fit with the organization. Physicians who embrace the care team model, understand how to utilize advanced practice providers, and enjoy leadership opportunities will be in high demand. In addition, recruits must understand new incentive and reimbursement structures. Physicians will be rewarded for meeting care management needs of patients; reimbursement will be tied to quality as opposed to quantity."

Characteristics of a potential population health physician leader, according to Jordan Search Consultants, include:

- A minimum of five to 10 years of practice experience.
- Board certification.

- A good understanding of the way Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) work.
- A plan to help move the population health management team to the next level.
- Mentoring ability.
- Advanced education.

"We've changed how we evaluate physician candidates and physician leaders so we can provide a better slate of candidates to our clients," said Jordan. "We want to assess their ability to embrace population health, their understanding of population health, and their attitude and ability to treat patients under a population health model. We have to dig more deeply. The physician leader of the population health management team will be working at the highest end of their license. We evaluate their ability to give direction and make assignments to the team and to educate their colleagues. They'll need to assess where the team is strong, and where it needs additional education, training and support. It'll be dictated not only by geography, but also by the socioeconomic element of the population being served."

Clients are thrilled, said Jordan, when the consulting firm finds a candidate who already knows the EMR system they've implemented.

"That's one less bridge to cross," she said.

One of the most pleasant surprises Jordan Search Consultants' recruiters have discovered in physician leader candidate pools is the growing number of

physician candidates who have, or are pursuing, advanced business degrees, such as an MBA, perhaps with a concentration in healthcare management, MHA (masters of healthcare administration), MPH (masters of public health), MHI (masters of healthcare informatics), MMM (masters of medical management), or MS-PopH (masters of population health).

"The MMM is a relatively new degree," Jordan said, adding the MS-PopH degree program is a brand new offering at Thomas Jefferson University, the nation's only school to offer that particular advanced degree. "They're educating themselves to lead the charge."

On the flip side, PCPs who otherwise might be excellent candidates for those positions simply lack time to pursue higher education.

"The rank-and-file practicing physician in a community doesn't need a degree in population health to see his patients," said Al Holloway, founder and president of TIPAAA (The Independent Physicians Association of America). "No, that doesn't make sense. Having an understanding of population health will impact his practice, but he doesn't need a degree in it."

The need for these type of leaders is unprecedented, said Jordan.

"As the demand increases, and we continue to have a very limited supply of physician professionals for these leadership positions, automatically the compensation goes up," she said. "That's something I hope potential candidates will strongly consider."