

Working to the Vision, Not the Job

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Urgent care is an evolving business model for health care. To attain operating efficiencies and in response to consumer and payer demand, we are seeing the rapid convergence of urgent care, primary care, occupational medicine, and ancillary services delivered through a walk-in, extended hours delivery channel. As a result, many urgent care practices envision expanding their scope of services beyond conventional “episodic.”

Carl has practiced in a hospital-affiliated urgent care center for the past 10 years and has a reputation of working hard and being responsible, honest and loyal. He is popular with the patients and staff and is considered a “trusted advisor” by the medical leadership. But he has also been rigid in how he sees the “business.” Specifically he believes the center should be staffed exclusively by board certified Emergency Medicine physicians, that the scope of practice is limited to “episodic acutely rising conditions” and that primary care, occupational medicine and other services have no place in the urgent care center.

When the health system’s leadership announced that the center would be integrating physicians assistants to improve flow, adding family medicine physicians who would treat urgent care but who would also have a panel of primary care patients, and contracting with local employers to provide physicals and treat initial workplace injuries; Carl led a rebellion of his colleagues. “We didn’t bargain for this,” he said.

These were not foolish, dumb, money-grabbing changes—they reflected a well-thought strategy that would help the health system protect its market share, generate downstream referrals, and improve utilization and profitability of the urgent care center itself while also reducing total health care costs for employers and government payers. In fact, as part of its vision, the hospital’s leadership not only had no plans to chase anyone out; it instead would upgrade its clinician’s skills at the center’s expense.

But nobody explained this vision to Carl and he did not try to discover it on his own. As Carl advocated for his colleagues, it became clear to the hospital’s leadership that he had no idea where the practice was headed. In his own words, he “looked foolish” and “lost credibility” and eventually the issue became polarizing in a way that need not have occurred. Shortly thereafter, Carl left the practice. The problem is that Carl never understood the importance of knowing the organization’s vision.

A vision statement focuses on an organization’s future—*what it intends to become*—and how that may be viewed by the outside world. For urgent care, a vision might entail “improving the community’s health,” “being a recognized leader in patient experience and clinical outcomes,” and “creating collaborative partnerships with referring physicians.” Your team needs to understand your center’s vision and understand, first, that if they do not support it they are not working towards the vision and; second, that the more comprehensively they understand the vision, the more effective they will be.

Shari was another provider in the same urgent care center as Carl. She made a point of understanding the health system’s vision and goals for the center and kept that understanding in mind everyday she went to work. She saw the new direction as a chance to sharpen and expand her clinical skills, she believed it would result in a greater variety of experiences, and she was confident that it would provide her with advancement opportunities. In preparation, on her own, she went to several conferences to improve her clinical and management skills. She then volunteered for a working group to explore how the center would transition and offered five or six suggestions that were thoughtfully considered by the hospital’s leadership. She was sincerely thinking about where the practice could go and her role in getting it there.

The gap between Carl and Shari is huge. Everyone on your team needs to consider the difference between simply coming to work and doing their jobs and understanding and participating in your organization’s vision. Offering good suggestions, gaining new knowledge and skills, and volunteering for added responsibilities will dramatically affect your team member’s attitudes, how they interact with one another, as well as their personal well-being.