



COMPASS

Partnering for Mind-Body Health

COMPASS Lessons Learned: Physician Champions



Physician champions have been identified as key to the successful implementation of the COMPASS model. They don't have to be the medical director, and may not go by the title "champion" depending upon the organization's make-up and/or culture, but these are the individuals who take ownership of advancing an initiative. Physician champions are usually integral to initiatives like COMPASS because they give credibility to the project and help get buy-in from other physicians. This guide, based on input from COMPASS Consortium partners as well as a review of the literature, is meant to help medical groups identify the traits, skills and actions of staff best suited to lead major changes in care delivery.

Effective Traits of a Physician Champion

- Curiosity, open to new ideas
- Emotional intelligence, diplomacy
- Passionate/enthusiastic, can-do attitude
- Responsible, accountable, persistent, disciplined
- Open and non-judgmental
- Integrity and has the respect of their peers
- "Thick-skinned" enough to tolerate/respond to criticism
- Flexible and controlled in the face of stress
- Team-oriented while leading the change

He is the constant voice supporting the change, and doesn't easily take no for an answer.

Effective Skills of a Physician Champion

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to both take a long view as well as operationalize a vision
- Ability to guide conversations towards a goal
- Can navigate the socio-political environment inside the organization
- Has insight into the culture of their departments and organization
- Ability to build consensus
- Recognizes the importance of "patience" and "timing"
- Recognizes the initiative's sustainability can't be dependent on one individual

She backs-up the care coordinators and steps in when needed.

Actions of a Physician Champion

- Sets clear expectations to staff regarding implementation
- Actively and enthusiastically promotes value of the innovation
- Discusses barriers, answers questions with other physicians
- Communicates strategies/challenges with leadership
- Shows appreciation for the efforts and contributions of others
- Refers patients into the program to set an example
- Keeps the project a priority and protects its resources
- Ensures that the innovation is implemented in the face of organizational inertia or resistance

He is ruthless about encouraging his colleagues to participate

How to Identify, Develop and Support a Successful Physician Champion

- Some self-identify, or the health care team or external partners recommend due to standing among peers
- May present as the initiative and specific skills needed evolve
- Set expectations of the physician champion at the beginning of the initiative
- With team support, a designated champion uncomfortable in the role can turn into a perfect match
- Allocate the champion the time necessary to fulfill the role and lead the initiative
- Encourage networking among champions throughout the initiative
- Those new to the role need to be supported by their teams and leadership to build needed skills

What Sets a Physician Champion Up for Failure

- Interests are not aligned with program's interests
- Lack of passion for the work or time allocated to project
- Lack of seniority within organization (sometimes)
- A good physician is not always a good champion
- Being too far ahead of the group as early adopters may not be best

Why is a Physician/Clinical Champion Needed for COMPASS-like Initiatives?

While we've profiled a physician champion, remember there can be multiple champions in your organization. You need a high-level executive advocate and an operational champion. Whoever is leading the initiative, they need to own it, promote team-based care and ultimately empower others on the team. There can never be too many champions on a team as multiple perspectives and skill-sets help with advancement and execution of the vision. Whoever is the champion, they can't be meek. It helps to be a *gentle bulldog*.



References

1. Assessing Physician Champion Potential for Success. Translating VTE Guidelines Into Practice. Health Services Advisory Group, Inc.
2. Byrnes J. Physician champions drive value--but how do you find them? *Health Finance Manage*. 2012 Feb;66(2):100,102.
3. Damschroder LJ. The role of the "champion" in infection prevention: results from a multisite qualitative study. *Qual Saf Health Care*. 2009;18:434-440.
4. Donahue KE, et al. Facilitators of transforming primary care: a look under the hood at practice leadership. *Annals of Family Medicine*. 2013;11(1):S27-S33.
5. Gallagher K, et al. It takes two: using coleaders to champion improvements in small primary care practices. *JABFM*. 2010 Sept-Oct;23(5):632-638.
6. Shaw EK, et al. The role of the champion in primary care change efforts: from the state networks of Colorado ambulatory practices and partners. *JABFM* Sept-Oct 2012;25(5)676-685.
7. Yackanicz L, et al. Physician buy-in for EMRs. *JHIM*. 2010;24(2):41-43.