

CMA leads drive to improve physicians' management skills

Steven Wharry

In Brief

THE PHYSICIAN MANAGER INSTITUTE, developed 12 years ago by the CMA and the Canadian College of Health Service Executives, provides training that is designed to improve physicians' management and leadership skills. Changes within health care are prompting more doctors to seek this training in order to become managers within a reformed health care system.

En bref

L'INSTITUT DE GESTION MÉDICALE, créé il y a une douzaine d'années par l'AMC et le Collège canadien des directeurs de services de santé, vise à améliorer les compétences de gestion et de leadership des médecins. La transformation des soins de santé incite un plus grand nombre de médecins à suivre ces cours pour se préparer à devenir gestionnaires dans un système de santé réformé.

Hospital amalgamation, high-stakes negotiations and regional health boards are just a few of the developments that have changed the face of medical management this decade. Many physicians are responding by seeking the management training they were never offered in medical school, and they are finding that the CMA is one of the big players in this emerging field.

The CMA's Physician Manager Institute (PMI) teaches doctors how to meet the growing challenges of health care administration, but its most important function may be to teach them how to be effective leaders. PMI courses, which are offered conjointly by the CMA and the Canadian College of Health Service Executives (CCHSE), give physicians the training needed to manage and work with other health care providers, managers, government representatives and others.

Dr. Paul Gardiner, who took over as medical director at the H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Centre in St. John's last August, quickly realized that his training as a thoracic surgeon had done little to prepare him for his new administrative duties.

Gardiner says the new emphasis on the team approach to caring for patients and running hospitals and other facilities means that physician-administrators must know how to work cooperatively with others. Although Gardiner had "team" experience while working within the clinical setting, he said PMI courses provided many new insights.

"These programs provide a wider understanding of how government and individuals each contribute to the workings of the health care system," he said, adding that he was so impressed with the program he completed all 4 levels of physician-manager training within 2 months.

The PMI has trained approximately 2000 physicians since 1984. During its 3-day courses, experts provide training in a variety of management and leadership techniques. The courses are aimed primarily at chiefs of staff, department heads and program directors.

Gardiner said the broad training not only provides sound management skills but also offers participants a fresh perspective. "Traditionally, physicians deal with patients and families on a one-on-one basis and obviously this should continue," he said. "However, physicians must also understand they have a wider responsi-



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He said the “big-picture mentality” physicians need today not only gives them a better outlook on the health care system but also adds a new perspective to the care they provide. “The PMI courses are positive experiences for physicians and that translates into better care for our patients. I think that is why most of us became physicians in the first place.”

Flexibility is one of the courses’ main attractions. They are held in cities across Canada and the program runs progressively, with participants “graduating” to the next level upon completion of the previous course.

“Someone was prescient to have launched these courses 12 years ago,” said Stephen Prudhomme, the CMA’s director of professional development, “because the need for this type of training really didn’t become crucial until several years later, when the restructuring we’re so familiar with today started in earnest. The cut-backs we’ve seen across the country only added to the need to do things differently, and I think that’s what these courses are about — they are designed to change physicians’ way of thinking about the way they work.”

Dr. Jim Millar, president and chief executive officer with the East Central Health District in Saskatchewan, took the PMI courses a step further when he organized an in-house session for administrators, physicians and members of the district health board in his area, which surrounds Yorkton, 45 km from Regina.

The in-house sessions, which are relatively new, are growing in popularity because they bring people together to meet an organization’s specific needs. They also eliminate travel and accommodation costs.

Millar is also impressed that the in-house courses can include everyone involved with an issue, not just physicians. “We had a new district health board and large changes within the administrations of several hospitals, so we felt we needed an exercise to bring people together and try to find common ground,” he said.

Millar thinks changes in the administration and management of health care in Yorkton had produced distrust between the district’s physicians and board members. He said the CMA’s in-house session provided a chance for them to meet face to face and work out some of the difficulties facing each group. He was impressed that the course offered practical alternatives that helped addressed the group’s specific problems.

“By noon of the second day, physicians were cursing their pagers because they didn’t want to leave the room and risk missing something,” said Millar.

He said the most important thing the course offers is the chance for physicians to develop the skills and trust needed to function within a team. Medical schools have

yet to cultivate this attitude, he said, but it is becoming increasingly important.

“Physicians have some experience working with others in certain situations, but the team approach has really expanded into all aspects of health care,” said Millar. “Often physicians feel reluctant to buy into these teams, but the PMI courses demonstrate the value of a team approach.”

He said physicians realize their responsibilities are expanding and they are willing to learn, but the difficulty often lies in finding the time to get more training. The PMI overcomes this by offering concise courses at different times, meaning the 4 levels of training can be completed when the timing is convenient.

“Physicians need to be involved in utilization management and review but medical school doesn’t teach them that,” said Millar. “Health care continues to evolve and those changes are forcing physicians to look at issues more globally.”

In addition to the 4 levels of PMI courses, the Physician Manager Institute also provides a refresher course for participants who have completed all 4 levels but want to brush up on the techniques they have learned. Further information is available from the CMA’s PMI coordinator, Heather Michael, at 800 663-7336, ext. 2261.‡

1997 Physician Manager Institute

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