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IPC chief to doc-exec: Step up

By *Lola Butcher*

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As the healthcare industry embarks on a period of historic change, leadership is needed more than ever, says Adam Singer, M.D., the chairman, CEO and chief medical officer of IPC-the Hospitalist Co. in North Hollywood, Calif.

Singer, who was recently named 2010 Physician Executive of the Year by the Medical Group Management Association and the American College of Medical Practice Executives, believes physician-executives have yet to fully tap their potential to help reshape the industry.

"Physician-executives need to start standing up and speaking to the issues that reform is going to raise," he said. "I'm not seeing enough of it."

Specifically, he encourages physician-executives to take an active role in working out new models of physician compensation that would work if bundled payments come into vogue.

Singer was recognized by the MGMA and the ACMPE for his pioneering role in the development of the hospitalist specialty. The company he started in 1995 now includes more than 1,400 hospitalist providers, making it the nation's largest hospital medicine practice.

As one of the few multistate medical group practices in the country, IPC manages more than 150 group practices in 21 states. IPC-affiliated hospitalists serve patients in more than 500 medical facilities. The company has been publicly traded since 2008.



Adam Singer, M.D.

In 2008, Singer received *Modern Physician's* first Physician Entrepreneur of the Year award. A decade earlier, he was listed among *Modern Healthcare's* Up & Comers after he raised \$40 million from investors to finance the growth of IPC.

"We need to take the lead on the re-engineering of hospitals and the way care is going to be delivered going forward," Singer says. "There are a lot of areas both businesswise and clinically that we need to be involved in."

To that end, IPC recently partnered with the University of California at San Francisco's division of hospital medicine and its Center for the Health Professions to develop a leadership training program for physician managers.

In the first phase of the program, which began this fall, participation was limited to 40 of IPC's clinical leaders, although Singer says it will not be an IPC-exclusive program going forward. Participants will learn leadership skills and receive training in quality improvement and patient safety.

Students also will conduct a quality/operational improvement project. That will involve selecting a key area in their own hospital, working with UCSF program mentors to develop and implement a plan to improve it, and measuring the results.

"The unspoken truth of the hospitalist industry is that we have very few hospitalists actually practicing today," Singer says. "What are being called hospitalists are essentially primary-care doctors who have given up their offices."

Those hospitalists have increased efficiency in the delivery system, but the potential of the hospitalist movement has not yet been reached, he says.

"If you take that same doctor with those clinical skills and add the management skills of how to lead teams, how to project-manage care initiatives, and how to understand the language of healthcare economics, that physician can actually drive the delivery system to a much higher level," he says. "That is a true hospitalist."

The MGMA and the ACMPE also recognized C. Ross Berry, CEO of Solaris Heart & Vascular in Marietta, Ga., as Medical Practice Executive of the Year for his role in transforming that cardiology practice.

When Berry joined the group in 2004, it was a four-physician, \$6 million practice operating in two locations and one health system. Today, it is a \$15 million practice that employs 25 physicians and 67 support personnel in four locations and operates at six hospitals in three health systems. The practice's market share increased from 16% in 2004 to 48% today.

That growth is attributed to Berry's five-year strategic plan and his recruitment of a sophisticated management team that implemented the plan effectively.

In addition to rebranding the practice with a new name and marketing initiative, Berry led the development of ancillary services, including electrophysiology and cardiac rehabilitation, and new locations to provide patients with greater access to services.

Under his leadership, the employee turnover rate fell from 54% to 8%, all managed-care and vendor contracts were renegotiated to improve the profitability of the practice, and an electronic health-record system was implemented.

Other awardees are:

- Thomas Stearns, a past president of the ACMPE board and a former MGMA director, who was honored for his lifetime of professional achievement with the Harry J. Harwick Lifetime Achievement Award. Stearns was instrumental in the MGMA's development of *The ACMPE Guide to the Body of Knowledge for Medical Practice Management*, a primary resource for individuals seeking to develop expertise in medical practice management. A past national chairman of the Bones Orthopaedic Managers Association, Stearns also served on the board of directors of the Center for Research in Ambulatory Health Care Administration. He was recognized this year for his long commitment to the Tennessee Medical Group Management Association. Stearns is vice president of medical practice services at the State Volunteer Mutual Insurance Co., where he organized the Physician Leadership Institute to teach physicians how to run the business side of a medical practice.
- Mercy Health System in Janesville, Wis., which was honored with the Fred Graham Award for Innovation in Improving Community Health for its role in establishing the Health Occupations Academy to address the shortage of healthcare workers. The academy allows high school students to take certified nursing assistant training courses for college credit so they are ready for higher-level coursework as soon as they graduate. The program has trained nearly 250 students since its inception in 2002. Before the academy started, a lack of classroom and clinical facilities to train CNAs had resulted in a long waiting list of applicants. That bottleneck, in turn, reduced the availability of students for associate degree nursing programs. Mercy partnered with a public school district and a local technical college to develop the academy. Mercy provides classroom, laboratory and clinical facilities to train up to 24 CNA students a year.
- Cordell Mack and Craig Pederson, partners at Health Care Futures in Edina, Minn., who were given the Edward B. Stevens Article of the Year Award for "Together ... yet separate: How your medical group can achieve integration with a hospital—without hospital employment." Published in the August 2009 issue of *MGMA Connexion*, the article discusses the pros and cons of a full-practice professional services agreement, in which a hospital owns and operates a physician clinic and contracts with an independent physician group to care for the patients served by that clinic. "A PSA maintains a medical practice's anatomy but refocuses physician energy to patient care and strategic leadership (v. the monotony of daily business operations)," the authors wrote. "Unencumbered by

an unsustainable business model and with a competitive pay plan, the group will be better positioned to compete for scarce physician resources.”

- Diane Bristol, administrator of Midland OB-GYN Associates in Midland, Mich., was cited for her efforts as the Michigan Medical Group Management Association's legislative liaison for the past 11 years with the Legislative Liaison of the Year Award. Her recent efforts include helping organize a rally in the state capital to protest a state provider tax. The nomination lauded Bristol for giving "her time, energy and heart in grass-roots efforts in educating, stimulating and challenging all to stand up and fight for issues that affect our practices, hospitals and rural clinics throughout the state."