Introduction and Background

The CSU Health Network Administrative Fellowship seeks to mirror the model of the approximately 75+ other such programs in the United States. Administrative fellowships are found in many health systems and hospitals, including locally at UCHealth and Children’s Hospital Colorado, and at institutions as well known as Duke, the Mayo Clinic, and Johns Hopkins. Traditionally, an administrative fellowship is completed immediately after the awarding of an MBA or MHA (Master of Healthcare Administration). At CSUHN, we specifically sought to provide a similar experience for a practicing mid-career clinician (physician, PA, or NP) who also held or was near completion of an MBA or MHA.

For the inaugural year of the CSUHN fellowship, the incumbent was a senior MBA student at CSU and a full-time PA in the medical clinic. The curriculum of the CSUHN fellowship placed the fellow as de facto member of the organization’s leadership team for one year, allowing access to the highest levels of decision making and strategic planning. The fellow attended the weekly leadership team meetings and had weekly one-on-one sessions with the Director of Medical Services, who served as the mentor for the fellowship. This high-level access gave the fellow the opportunity to become involved in the operations of every part of this large and diverse clinic, applying the knowledge, skills, and abilities learned in the MBA program. The “primary benefit the fellow receives is exposure to senior management—something that cannot be duplicated any other way, both in the depth of senior management and breadth of the organization.”(1)

Capstone

In July 2017, CSUHN moved into a newly constructed $55M facility. Prior to the move, the entire health network was spread across three different locations on campus. Once in the new building, it soon became apparent that many key questions about operational efficiency were challenging for the leadership to answer, due to the growing complexity of the organization. It was thus the intent of the fellow to utilize the capstone project to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the operational efficiency of CSUHN and to design a digital dashboard to report those metrics on a regular basis. Industry best practices call for KPIs to be tied to the organization’s strategic plan (2), so the fellow worked with department leaders and consulted resources from the American College Health Association, the Medical Group Management Association, and the American College of Healthcare Executives for potential metrics that would help CSUHN achieve its strategic goals.

Seventy-seven possible KPIs, ranging from simple profit margin to pounds of medical waste produced, were identified. The fellow met with the necessary stakeholders and narrowed the list to create a working draft of a dashboard. The current working version of the dashboard is designed to encompass four functional areas of CSUHN: Volume and Growth, Service and Quality, Billing, Financial, and Staffing; and HEPS (health education). Public Health. Some of the individual KPIs in each area, such as employee turnover and patient satisfaction, could easily be deemed important to any organization in the service industry. Others, such as Chlamydia rates, are inherently specific to medicine. The benchmark rate for each KPI can be found by using industry-accepted standards, or it can be done internally by comparing each KPI to the historical trends of that specific metric.

Selected Projects

- Worked with an independent risk management firm to arrange special training for providers and staff to develop best practices for promoting patient safety with sensitive exams.
- Partnered with SLC/Utah to develop an alternative spring break experience for CSU pre-health students that will launch in March 2019. This service experience will expose students to medical volunteering. In keeping with the leadership vision of CSU, this trip will focus on a rural community in southwestern Colorado.
- Developed and executed a study (highlighted in bottom left) examining efficiencies and waiting times in the bone cancer clinic to create internal benchmarks and leaner workflows.
- Helped coordinate a half-day safety retreat for the staff which included a one-hour presentation by the fellow on creating a culture of safety and quality at CSUHN.
- As chair of the CSUHN Employee Wellness and Engagement Committee, the fellow is developing and enacting programs to increase employee health and cooperation across teams.
- Active member of the quality improvement, safety, and accreditation committees.
- Developed a presentation on medical ethics that was delivered at a statewide medical conference.
- Wrote and revised key clinical and administrative policies and procedures to reflect current evidence-based practices.
- Coordinated “Stop the Bleed” training for the entire staff. Lectured to the health students in the Key pre-med and student clubs about future opportunities in medicine.
- Represented CSU’s medical services at the American College Health Association national conference in Washington, DC. At this conference, the fellow was elected president of the Rocky Mountain College Health Association for 2019-2020.
- Completed CSU’s Supervisory Development Program, Ready Colorado State, Safe Zone, and other CSU-specific training.

Discussion

The CSUHN Administrative Fellowship has successfully created a pathway to higher management for practicing clinicians and medical leaders. In doing so, it helps prevent the negative effects of the “Peter Principle.” The Peter Principle suggests that in any organization, employees are promoted based on their performance in their current role, without preparation to assume the next higher role in the organization. This is often seen in healthcare, “where individuals with strong clinical skills may be promoted into supervisory and management roles without the requisite skills and training for those responsibilities.” (3)

The structured nature of the fellowship allowed for practical application of skills learned in the CSU MBA program. The overall outcome of the fellowship has been a positive contribution to the operations of CSUHN. The fellowship will continue to provide similar experiences in subsequent years and become a pathway for the preparation of clinical and administrative leaders in healthcare. Future work will focus on ongoing development of experiences for subsequent fellows and recruiting qualified candidates.

References