

Harnessing the Power of Physician Champions

By Michael T. Ferris



For every home health or hospice care plan, a physician is a key member of the team. The agency's sales people and management should be probing for needs and presenting solutions. When the relationship with the physician progresses to the point of reliance on the agency for all things related to home health and hospice, then they can become a champion for the agency.

The physician that values the services of a particular agency typically has had past experiences that have created trust. Usually, this means that there have been problems that were resolved to their complete satisfaction. Trust takes years to develop and only moments to destroy.

The ways to expand business are either to increase your share of physicians' referrals or to expand the use of home health and hospice in their practice. To garner a greater percentage of their referrals, it is necessary to know the competition and the referral source's needs. Then position your agency as the logical solution. The other way is to bring ideas such as technology and information that will have physicians use home health or hospice for more of their patients. For hospice, that can translate into longer length of stays. Never assume that the physicians know all of the possible uses for your services.

One way to develop strong relationships

is to include physicians and their staff in the development of new programs and protocols. Pride of authorship is created when the agency involves physicians in developing these protocols and specialty programs. If the plan of care is created using "their" methodology, they will be better champions for the agency's programs.

The other key component of creating and maintaining these key referral relationships is service – make their lives easy and earn their business. Create service protocols that make the interface with the agency feel customized, and you create a significant competitive advantage. Once you have established the service plan for the referrals' source, never assume that there are no further changes – keep probing for service needs.

When you talk with physicians and their staffs, remember that the patients are THEIR patients, not yours. This may seem like a small point, but it can make a big difference in how they hear what you are saying. Often, patients have had the same physician for many years, and when they are referred to home health or hospice, they still feel that they are their patients.

Work to develop strong, personal relationships for best long-term results. Help them be great champions for your organizations. Good Luck and Happy Selling!

Sales Manager's Corner:

Each month I will address one issue or answer one question dealing with sales management issues. Feel free to submit questions to cat@nahc.org. This month's issue is a question I receive frequently: "What role should my medical director play in the sales and marketing of our services?"

(Note: this answer is strictly confined to the role of the medical director in the business development aspect of the relationship.)

The medical director should be an advocate for the agency and its services in the community. She/he should be convinced that the agency is the best one. They should be involved in the creation of sales campaigns, marketing materials and service programs designed for the referring physician. The agency should treat the medical director as they do any other referring physician, and probe for needs on an ongoing basis. They must earn their referrals just as they would any others.

About the Author: *Michael T. Ferris, Managing Principal, Home Care Marketing Solutions, Chapel Hill, NC. Author of: "How To: Market and Deliver Legendary Service," "Managing Home Care Sales Teams for Legendary Results," "101 Home Care Promotional Strategies" and "The Complete Guide to Home Care Sales & Marketing for Legendary Results." NAHC Members receive a 15% discount on these publications. Mike may be contacted at mike@hcmarketingsolutions.com Sign up for his free home care and hospice sales and marketing newsletter at www.hcmarketingsolutions.com*