Data-Driven Insights for Your 2016 Physician Engagement Strategy

Findings from the Advisory Board Survey Solutions' National Engagement Database
Survey Solutions Physician Engagement

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For Further Information
This report only scratches the surface of the Advisory Board’s resources on workforce engagement. Please don’t hesitate to contact us at abssinfo@advisory.com if you would like to see more on:
• Additional cuts of our benchmark
• Analysis of our key findings
• Best practices.

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Partnering with Providers to Build a High Performance Culture

Introducing Survey Solutions

Advisory Board Survey Solutions combines the resources of the full Advisory Board with a world-class survey platform and a dedicated staff. We serve as an objective partner with industry expertise to help ensure your survey investments advance organizational performance.

To learn why hundreds of leading health care providers have switched to Advisory Board Survey Solutions, please contact us at ABSSinfo@advisory.com or visit advisory.com/abss.

1M+
Survey respondents

10%
Average annual improvement in engagement

20,000+
Action plans created via online action planning tool

90%+
Annual renewal rate

Ensuring a Return on Your Survey Investment

Key Attributes of Our Solutions

› Right Question Set for the Right People
› Prescriptive Results
› Change Management Expertise
› Leader-Centric Action Plans

Representative Offerings

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY
360° support for advancing provider staff commitment

PHYSICIAN ENGAGEMENT SURVEY
Targeted survey questions for employed, affiliated, and independent physicians

NURSE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY
Magnet-compliant assessment with department- and unit-level drill-downs

PHYSICIAN NEEDS ASSESSMENT
Solicits medical staff input to inform future investments in provider network

CULTURE OF SAFETY SURVEY
End-to-end administration and analytics for the AHRQ survey suite

PATIENT EXPERIENCE PLATFORM
Captures real-time patient feedback and creates actionable insights

CULTURAL AUDIT
Defines an organizational culture that will attract, retain, and inspire top talent

LEADER CENTRIC ACTION PLANNING
Best-in-class software for integrating performance improvement efforts
Nine Data-Driven Insights

1. **Match the level of commitment** you seek to the nature of each physician’s economic affiliation

   Setting different aims for independent medical staff members and closer economic affiliates positions provider organizations to optimize their working relations with both. In general, it is unrealistic to ask independent physicians to think about your larger organizational priorities before the needs of their own business, which is what one effectively seeks when striving for *engagement*. Business *alignment* is the right relational goal for most independent staff: to support shared business interests, typically through referrals and admissions.  

   In contrast, provider organizations should not only seek engagement from employed and other economically affiliated physicians, but set more ambitious targets. Notwithstanding the greater demands of engagement, organizations pursuing a bifurcated strategy are achieving higher average levels of engagement than alignment.

   *See Chart 1 for the Advisory Board’s definition of engagement and alignment.*

2. **Capitalize on even small improvements** in physician engagement to differentiate your organization

   The rapidly shifting health care industry is often used as a scapegoat to explain the challenge of engaging physicians in organizational strategy. However, the percentage of engaged physicians among organizations using our survey solution inched upward. Given larger industry struggles, even small increases in engagement can heavily impact physicians seeking better collaboration with their employer or economic affiliate. Your organization should view competitor stagnation on engagement as an opportunity to set itself apart from the pack by heightening its focus on physician engagement, rather than as an excuse to accept current levels as sufficient.

   *See Chart 2 for physician engagement trends from 2014 to 2015.*

3. **Strive for an all-time high on independent physician support for common interests**

   While engagement among employed physicians has stalled over the past year, the same is not true for the level of commitment among independent physicians. Overall alignment has risen significantly while disaffection has declined, suggesting that independent physicians are increasingly committed to the health systems at which they practice. Most health systems should set a higher bar here, aiming for sizeable increases in the level of alignment with their independent physicians.

   *See Chart 3 for physician alignment trends from 2014 to 2015.*
Adopt a multiyear strategy for addressing specific engagement and alignment drivers

Despite the myriad changes in the health care industry, the most impactful drivers of engagement and alignment are relatively constant year over year. Responsiveness to physician input and executive actions reflective of physician priorities are consistently among the highest impact drivers of engagement for economic affiliates, surpassing even care quality and support for economic growth. Among independent medical staff, a rewarding leadership role and a great place to practice are still the most powerful drivers of alignment, or business loyalty.

Rather than starting fresh each year with a new set of initiatives targeting different drivers, most organizations are better served by pursuing a long-term approach centered on the most impactful drivers which they refine after each survey to account for unique and often shorter term opportunities.

See Charts 5 and 6 for the list of drivers with the strongest impact on overall engagement and alignment, respectively, for 2014 and 2015.

Commit to achieving higher levels of service excellence

While the most impactful drivers of physician commitment remain relatively consistent year over year, service excellence is a notable exception. Unranked last year, “This organization provides excellent service to patients” is now among the most impactful drivers of engagement and alignment for the overall medical staff as well as PCPs.

The rising significance of service quality on physician commitment mirrors its rising importance in the industry overall. Health systems are increasingly incentivized for meeting service metrics, and patients are increasingly considering service quality as a key criterion when determining where to receive care.

See Charts 5 and 6 for the list of drivers with the strongest impact on overall engagement and alignment, respectively, for 2014 and 2015. See Charts 7 and 8 for the list of drivers with the strongest overall engagement and alignment for PCPs, respectively, for 2014 and 2015.
Seek synergies between employee and physician engagement strategies

There is a strong positive correlation between employee engagement and physician engagement. This suggests that efforts to drive employee engagement have a high degree of interaction with efforts to drive physician engagement. In addition to combining efforts across your medical staff on top impact drivers that impact both engagement and alignment (leadership opportunities, care quality, service excellence), your organization should actively seek synergies between its employee and physician engagement strategies.

See Chart 9 for the correlations between employee engagement, provider engagement and provider alignment.

Do not assume you must vary your engagement strategy based on key generational differences

Generational differences in the workplace are garnering widespread media attention. The ties that bind physicians together, however, appear far greater than the generational differences that divide. Compared to other professions, differences in physician engagement level by tenure are quite modest. Similarly, the most impactful drivers of engagement are relatively consistent across the generations – with one notable exception.

The notable exception is physicians with less than one year of tenure. Minimal overlap exists between their top drivers of engagement and the remainder of the medical staff, suggesting most organizations would be best served to focus efforts to account for generational differences narrowly on new physicians.

See Charts 10 and 11 for the engagement levels by tenure and the top impact drivers of engagement by tenure.

High performers should aim for “strong” agreement to drive engagement and alignment

Seeking agreement or strong agreement with the drivers of engagement and alignment is sufficient for most organizations’ physician commitment strategy. Physicians already exhibit high levels of commitment. For select drivers, achieving strong agreement provides particularly significant leverage in moving individuals from content to engaged and from loyal to aligned.

See charts 12 and 13 for the list of drivers that vary most significantly on strong agreement between alignment and loyalty and between engagement and contentment, respectively.
Supporting Data and Analysis

Results from the Survey Solutions’ National Physician Engagement Database

**Chart 1: Methodology: Advisory Board Survey Solutions’ Engagement and Alignment Indices**

_Differentiated Dependent Variables for Measuring Physician Commitment_

**Engagement Index**
- This organization inspires me to perform my best
- I am willing to put in a great deal of effort in order to help this organization succeed
- I would recommend this organization to other clinicians as a great place to practice
- I am likely to be practicing with this organization three years from now

**Alignment Index**
- I prefer to refer or admit my patients to this organization
- I would recommend this organization to other clinicians as a great place to practice
- I am willing to serve this organization in non-clinical roles such as positions on committees

We cannot expect the same level of commitment from our independent providers as we can (and should) from our employed providers. Simply cutting your survey data by economic affiliation will not provide sufficient information to evaluate your physician relations strategy. Given the need to build two wholly distinct relationships, you need to measure their commitment levels differently.

Our survey uses the separate indices shown above to accomplish this, measuring engagement among economically affiliated physicians and alignment among independent physicians. Our engagement index is designed to assess willingness to expend discretionary effort to _advance organizational strategy_. Our alignment index assesses _willingness to support shared business interests_ by generating profitable volumes. And we set a principled bar: to be considered engaged or aligned, a physician must at minimum agree with all items in the relevant index and must strongly agree with at least two of them.

**Chart 2: Physician Engagement Distribution by Year**

_Percentage of Respondents by Engagement Category, 2014-2015_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disengaged</th>
<th>Ambivalent</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2 compares the 2014 and 2015 performance distributions for physician engagement. Overall, engagement is holding roughly flat across the distribution, with a slight increase in polarization; more physicians are engaged and disengaged in 2015 compared to 2014, though by less than a percentage point.
Chart 4 plots each specialty based on its engagement and alignment relative to physicians overall. The specialties in the bottom-left quadrant fall short on both measures.

Of particular interest are the specialties that are high in engagement and low in alignment and vice versa (the top left and bottom right quadrants), as these categorizations can inform what your organization’s relational goals for these types of providers should be. For example, many primary care physicians demonstrate high engagement but low alignment, suggesting organizations should consider a unique approach to addressing independent PCP alignment.
Charts 5 and 6 define the top drivers of engagement and alignment, respectively, from 2014 to 2015. What is notable here is the remarkable similarities between the two years. This suggests that the aspects of an organization that drive physician commitment remain consistent year over year, and are not highly fickle to changes in the industry. While the initiatives and actions your organization takes to improve provider relations should always be subject to reevaluation, the specific drivers of engagement and alignment you are attempting to inflect should not necessarily change each year.

The one significant change for which most organizations may need to adjust is the appearance on both lists of excellent service. This is increasing in importance within the industry overall, in terms of financial reimbursement and how patients choose where to receive care. Health care organizations should ensure that physician perceptions of customer service are a part of their engagement and alignment strategies.
### Chart 7: Top Drivers by Impact on Engagement for Primary Care Providers

*Rank determined by Multivariate Regression Analysis of 10 Universal Drivers and 18 Engagement Drivers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>All Staff Rank</th>
<th>PCP Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this organization to a friend or relative to receive care.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The actions of this organization's executive team reflect the goals and priorities of participating clinicians.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization is open and responsive to my input.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization is well-prepared to meet the challenges of the next decade.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in physician leadership opportunities at this organization.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization provides excellent care to patients.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization supports my professional development.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization supports the economic growth and success of my individual practice.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over the past year I have not been asked by this organization to do anything that would compromise my values.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization provides excellent service to patients.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chart 8: Top Drivers by Impact on Alignment for Primary Care Providers

*Rank determined by Multivariate Regression Analysis of 10 Universal Drivers and 11 Alignment Drivers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>All Staff Rank</th>
<th>PCP Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in physician leadership opportunities at this organization.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization provides excellent clinical care to patients.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a high degree of confidence in this organization's medical staff.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization provides excellent service to patients.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view this organization as a strategic partner in navigating the changing healthcare landscape.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization offers the clinical services that my patients need.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This organization accepts the insurance most commonly used by my patients.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charts 7 and 8 compare the top drivers of engagement and alignment for PCPs to those of other specialties. What is notable is that these lists are nearly identical, suggesting organizational efforts to improve physician relations will be meaningful to all physicians, regardless of specialty. A unique PCP approach may not be necessary, though additional efforts may be prudent to ensure initiatives intended to improve performance on common drivers translate to PCPs.
Chart 9: Relationship between Physician and Employee Engagement

Physician/Employee Engagement Correlations

Correlations across %Engaged/Aligned across organizations which administered both surveys

0.56 Correlation between physician %Engaged and employee %Engaged

0.20 Correlation between physician %Aligned and employee %Engaged

0.21 Correlation between physician %Aligned and physician %Engaged

Chart 9 illustrates the strength of the relationship between three metrics: employee engagement, physician engagement, and physician alignment. While the first two are strongly correlated, neither shows a strong correlation with physician alignment.

This suggests that efforts to improve engagement have the ability to impact both employees and physicians who are employed or otherwise closely affiliated with the organization.

Chart 10: Variation in Percentage of Physician Engagement by Experience

Percentage of Respondents Engaged, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>% Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 20 years</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 10 displays the percent of engaged physicians by tenure in medicine. Despite difficulty acclimating to many of the industry’s changes, physicians with greater than 16 years of tenure in medicine tend to have the highest levels of engagement. For the most part, little variation exists in the engagement levels of physicians with less than 16 years of tenure.
Chart 11 displays the most impactful drivers of physician engagement by tenure in medicine. For the most part, across the tenure bands when one considers the top drivers, there is greater commonality than differences. Work/life balance, autonomy, administrative updates, and effective communication from clinical leaders are additional themes that show as top drivers for certain tenure bands.

Of particular note is the lack of similarity between physicians with less than one year of tenure compared to their peers. The minimal overlap in top drivers suggests organizations should take a unique approach to engaging physicians at the very start of their career.
## Chart 12: Performance Variation on Strong Agreement with Top Drivers of Alignment, 2015

### Percentage of Respondents Strongly Agreeing by Alignment Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driver Impact Rank</th>
<th>Top Drivers</th>
<th>Aligned</th>
<th>Loyal</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am interested in physician leadership opportunities at this organization.</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>This organization provides excellent clinical care to patients.</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I have a high degree of confidence in this organization’s medical staff.</td>
<td>65.6%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>This organization provides excellent service to patients.</td>
<td>65.0%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I view this organization as a strategic partner in navigating the changing healthcare landscape.</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>This organization offers the clinical services that my patients need.</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>This organization accepts the insurance most commonly used by my patients.</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>This organization makes patient safety a priority.</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Charts 12 and 13 compare the percentage of physicians who strongly agree with the top drivers for the aligned versus loyal and engaged versus content categories. While the difference in the percentage of physicians who agree or strongly agree in these comparative categories with these questions is modest, there are significant differences when looking only at the percentage who strongly agree (the top box).

For this reason, many of our most progressive partners have started to focus on increasing their ‘Strongly Agree’ scores instead of their ‘Agree/Strongly Agree’ scores.