

# Four Keys to Engage Physicians in Reducing Unwarranted Care Variation

Relentless margin pressures and growing evidence of unwarranted variation in clinical practice have made physician-driven care standardization a top strategic priority for most health care providers. However, common engagement models such as employment, productivity incentives, and privilege negotiation haven't led to proactive and sustained engagement among physician leaders or those on the front lines.

## Clinician Engagement Below the Industry Average

41.1% industry average  
34.8% nursing staff  
34.2% employed physicians  
28% independent physicians

Taking physicians from reluctant participants to motivated pace-setters of care variation reduction requires hospital executives to emphasize the intrinsic motivators that drive physicians. Tapping into the core values that initially attracted physicians to clinical practice will yield the culture of engagement and accountability necessary to sustain reliable care delivery. Here are four keys to physician engagement that health systems should consider.

### Common Practice Pitfalls

#### No connection between performance goals and core values

Most physicians went into medicine because they wanted to provide the best care to sick patients. Relying solely on financial incentives fails to leverage this intrinsic motivation, which is essential for deeper and lasting engagement. Health systems must lead with a patient-centric message tailored to the unique physician culture and set an aspirational vision beyond arbitrary short-term goals.

#### New campaigns lack compelling evidence

Trained as scientists, physicians are taught to take nothing at face value, to question and corroborate evidence. Upon entering the leadership ranks, they are asked to lead campaigns with minimal supporting data. Physician leaders rightly hesitate to recommend practice changes in the absence of compelling evidence to convince frontline physicians, as it erodes their clinical credibility. Getting physicians to change their practice requires more than just a top-down assertion from the C-suite, but rather an appeal to their scientist mindset.

#### There are only so many hours in the day

Piling on new "campaigns of the month" without recognition of the existing demands on physicians' time alienates rather than engages them. Burnout is at an all-time high, and change overload is a big contributor. Between juggling clinic hours, procedures, documentation, literature reviews, and quality initiatives, physicians are unable to stretch any further unless new standards simplify care delivery.

#### Misaligned financial incentives

To reduce care variation among physicians, hospitals must monitor performance and provide incentives based on adherence to care standards, quality outcomes, and cost impact. Yet most physicians are still incentivized for productivity, documentation, and patient volumes rather than evidence-based care. Further, many incentive plans focus on individual specialties and put different care team members at cross-purposes to one other.

### Tactics to Unlock Physician Engagement



#### HEARTS: Lead with a value-focused message

- Determine the right branding for the overall program

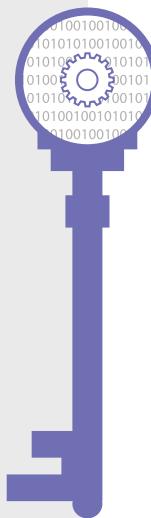


- Craft a patient-centric elevator pitch



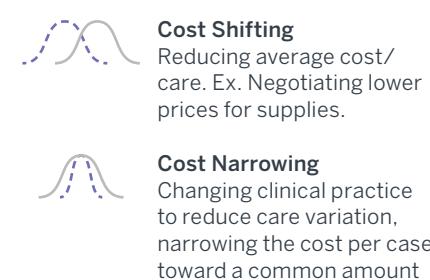
- Use terminology that aligns physicians with the cause

X	✓
Cost reduction	Clinical optimization
Reducing physician variation	Providing reliable care



#### MINDS: Upskill physician leaders with data and training

- Train emerging clinical leaders on health care economics and science of high reliability



- Arm leaders with ironclad data that makes the case for practice change

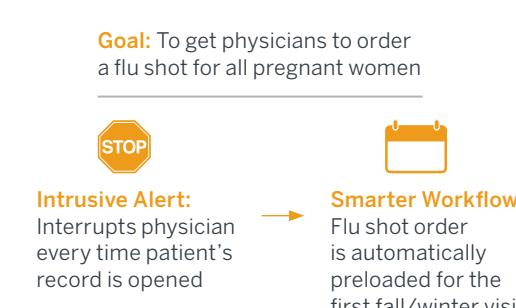
- Share clear evidence supporting the proposed best practice in the form of peer-reviewed studies or practice-based evidence
- Provide regular access to data on individual practice patterns, variation from common standard, and associated impact on cost and quality

- Entrust physicians with leadership of care standardization efforts

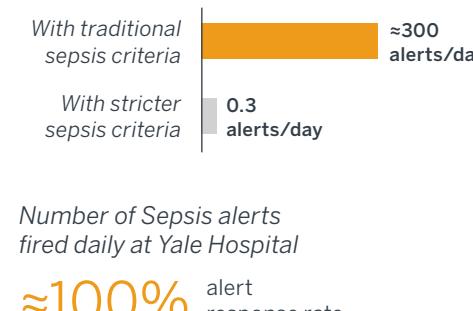


#### WATCHES: Find ways to reduce, not add, to workload

- Replace intrusive EHR alerts with user-friendly guided workflows with "fewer clicks"



- Raise the bar for triggering critical alerts



- Stagger change initiatives through enterprise change calendars

	INITIATIVE	
	Antibiotic stewardship	Glycemic control
DEC '17	Medium	
JAN '18		High
FEB '18	Low	Medium



#### WALLETS: Ensure financial incentives are aligned

- Enact performance-based bonus potential for employed physicians

Contract options for hospital based physicians

- Incentive-based professional services agreement
- Exclusive provider contract
- Management services agreement
- Co-management agreement
- Clinical integration network
- Health system employment

- Select clinically appropriate metrics for independent and affiliated physicians

Memorial Hermann's neurosurgery incentive metric categories



- When possible, execute multispecialty contracts to promote team-based care

