Strategic Planning for Your Medical Practice

Strategic planning as a process implies a look at the future and anticipation of changes. Your practice mission statement, values, and past performance will all dictate how your practice will respond to future events.

**Source:** Physicians Practice

The medical practice world is full of uncertainties. We can't keep up with the regulations, audits, reimbursement changes, meaningful use stages, and so much more, so why would we want to plan? While it is true that there are uncertainties in our world, you can only operate in a reactive mode if you don't take the time to plan. In this environment, reaction equals crisis, which means potentially wrong decisions would be made affecting both the short- and long-term survival and success of your practice.

Strategic planning as a process implies a look at the future and anticipation of changes that may occur based on both past and anticipated future performance. Your practice mission statement, values, and past performance will dictate to a degree how you will respond to future events.

**Planning techniques**
All physicians and key decision-makers of the practice should meet with a planning facilitator for the purposes of taking a serious look at the practice's future. One way to do this is to set up a planning retreat. During an annual planning retreat, decision-makers typically conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). They can then expand on their analysis to construct a bigger-picture look at their practice's projected future.

One approach is to use a significant planning tool called "scenario planning." Key decision-makers ask themselves, "What are the most likely scenarios that could affect the practice in the future?" Scenario planning posits that there could be four different possibilities which should be considered now, but not yet acted upon.

These types of scenarios when placed on a matrix could be represented by a y-axis of growth and an x-axis of stability. For example: The four-part matrix could be comprised of a "dying" quadrant, "remain as we are" quadrant, "growth through integration" quadrant, and a "control the market" for your specialty quadrant. Once the practice has identified four possible scenarios, it is possible to initiate discussions about how each of these possible outcomes would impact the practice and its future success or failure.

Fleshing out this skeleton allows the practice to assess each possible outcome and its chances of occurring. Reviewing each scenario further will begin to reveal actions that could be taken in the next period, e.g., the next fiscal year, or over any period that would not negatively affect the practice and yet keep it moving forward through growth.

**Set goals and completion dates**
Here is a key lesson: Most plans fail due to poor execution. Therefore, in your planning retreat make certain that tasks are assigned with target milestones or completion dates. Throughout the next year expect status or completion reports on the key action items identified in the plan.

As time moves forward, the next annual planning retreat may reveal that one of the scenarios your practice developed is more likely to become a reality than any other. At that point, you have already mapped out the basics of a plan that would enable you to move at an acceptable speed toward action and correction.

Making an effort to plan at the end of the calendar year, reviewing the options that might be available, and developing an implementation strategy will mean that you have completed a successful strategic planning process. Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."

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