

Are You Listening to Your Physicians? Are You Sure?

Client

CarolinaEast Health System first opened its doors in 1962 and has grown right along with the community of New Bern, NC. Once a 100-bed county hospital, CarolinaEast Health System today is a 350-bed, multi-facility healthcare provider to the five-county coastal Carolina region.

CarolinaEast's mission is to provide comprehensive and quality healthcare services to the people in its surrounding counties; and its vision is to be a premiere, locally owned and operated healthcare organization that recognizes and accepts the responsibility for stewardship that comes with being a sole community provider. CarolinaEast fulfills this responsibility through conscientious investments in people, technology, and infrastructure necessary to provide excellent healthcare services.

Case study

If there is one thing that Ray Leggett has learned since becoming CEO of CarolinaEast Health System in 2008, it is that every step toward improving physician-hospital relationships relies on strong communication. The alignment of medical staff and hospital leaders that such communication produces is essential to achieving success in all areas.

To that end, Leggett asked a group of informal physician leaders to join him for a weekly breakfast. Over eggs and toast, Leggett listens as the group he jokingly calls his "Dirty Dozen" share medical staff happenings and ideas. The breakfast crowd has no decision-making authority, but serves as a great venue for Leggett to get the scoop on what issues concern physicians. "It is an informal, give-and-take, open discussion," he says.

Leggett has also initiated a quarterly meeting with the executive committee of the medical staff, the board of directors, and the vice president of medical affairs to discuss the direction in which the hospital is headed.

"Hospitals typically are rumor mills, and oftentimes the rumor that is floating around is far from reality. I am finding that the more the medical staff is included and the more communication we have about what we are doing and why we are doing it, the better the chances that physicians will accept it and even endorse it," Leggett says.

Learning through listening

Through improved communication, Leggett has learned that more physicians are interested in being employees of the hospital. Employment often offers physicians more reasonable work hours and a steadier income than independent practice and relieves them from the burden of maintaining an office. CarolinaEast is exploring employment opportunities with several local medical groups to meet this demand.

Most importantly, he learned that for the hospital to succeed, the physicians in the community need to succeed. That's why the organization constantly looks for opportunities to educate independent practitioners. For example, CarolinaEast recently organized an event to educate community providers on proper coding practices. This type of education gives community physicians a sense that the hospital is looking out for their best interests.

CarolinaEast also steps in—when it is legally permissible—to help community practices by offering first-year income guarantees to new recruits.

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“We’ve basically tried to take some of the financial risk off of some of these groups when they recruit new physicians. We’re not going to do anything that is illegal, but there are opportunities when we can work with our medical staff members to create a win-win,” Leggett says.

Preparing for the future

With the help of The Greeley Company, Leggett determined which specialties needed succession planning. “Greeley was very helpful in looking at the average age of the medical staff and workload distribution to find where we were likely to be vulnerable going forward and where we needed to devote our time and resources,” says Leggett.

In an effort to fill potential leadership gaps, Leggett has developed a list of physicians with leadership potential that he will approach with a single question: “Will you allow the hospital to educate you on leadership issues to prepare you to step into a medical staff leadership position down the road?”

Without a strong leadership base, the progress that CarolinaEast has made in recent years will slip down the drain, Leggett explains. “The Greeley Company encouraged me and other hospital leaders to take the lead—if not us, then who?”

5 of the 10 Steps to Hospital-Physician Collaboration

To be successful in meeting its mission, a hospital must align the interests of physicians and hospital leaders. **The Greeley Company** uses this approach to enhance collaboration and ensure results through the following steps:

1. Acknowledge that physicians are customers, partners, suppliers, and competitors.
2. Heal the past.
3. Create a shared vision of success.
4. Develop mutual expectations of each other.
5. Invest in medical staff leadership by mentoring physicians with leadership potential and providing educational opportunities.

To learn the next five steps in The Greeley Company's process, please call 888/749-3054 or e-mail tgc@greeley.com.

ABOUT GREELEY

The Greeley Company

Headquartered in the greater Boston area, The Greeley Company serves administrative and clinical teams in more than 500 healthcare organizations nationwide each year—ranging from the largest healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We have a rich history of providing innovative consulting, education, outsourcing solutions, interim staffing, and external peer review to healthcare organizations nationwide. Greeley focuses on contemporary needs and challenges related to medical staff optimization & physician alignment; accreditation, regulatory compliance & quality; and credentialing & privileging.

Our mission

The Greeley Company's mission is to help healthcare organizations improve efficiency, comply with regulations and standards, achieve practitioner engagement and alignment, and excel in delivering high-quality, cost-effective patient care.

Our clients

Our clients include healthcare organizations of all sizes and types—from large, multi-setting healthcare systems and academic medical centers to critical access rural hospitals. We work with clinical and administrative individuals and teams across the entire organization including physicians, executives, directors, managers, and frontline staff.

Our advisors and staff

The Greeley Company provides our clients with a dedicated team of advisors who bring valuable experience and rich backgrounds as former hospital, nurse, and physician executives, as former “Big 4” consultants, and as former regulatory surveyors. Our professionals understand your pain and provide the breadth and depth of preparation, training, and education needed to drive success. Behind our advisors stand talented management and support staff committed to ensuring the highest level of customized attention and client fulfillment.

Contact us

Please contact us at 888/749-3054 or info@greeley.com for more information on how The Greeley Company can help you meet your challenges and goals.