

ARTICLE

Medical staff services plays a core role in strategic growth: Here's how

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While healthcare leaders may immediately associate strategic growth with an expanded physical footprint and increase in net revenue, the ability to recruit and retain top clinical talent is also an important barometer of success.

Over the next decade, experts predict the employment of physicians will grow 4%, with approximately 23,600 job openings annually. Employment of advanced practice professionals is expected to grow 40% (much faster than average) during the same period. However, industry data also suggests there may not be enough clinicians to meet the demands of today's growing health systems. As organizations vie for limited clinical resources, an elevated medical staff services department (MSSD) will be a differentiator.

How the MSSD promotes growth

Many growth-oriented goals are tied directly to the bedrock of every healthcare organization: Its clinical providers. Attracting highly sought-after specialists—and the attention of recruiters working on their behalf—requires organizations to differentiate

themselves. Providing a competitive salary, securing a hefty budget for continuing medical education credits, and ensuring access to state-of-the-art facilities and medical equipment are a good start.

However, the most important differentiator is often overlooked—ensuring clinicians can start seeing patients as quickly as possible. This is what clinicians want. It's also what healthcare organizations *need*.

An efficient process for onboarding clinicians helps health systems increase patient access to address community needs more effectively. It also helps health systems go to market with new service lines more quickly, potentially gaining a competitive advantage with enhanced patient access to faster appointments for specialty services not available at other facilities.

Streamlined processes also promote business continuity and clinician retention during mergers and acquisitions. Integrating disparate providers into a single health system requires efficient processes for privileging, credentialing, and enrollment. Without them, organizations may be particularly vulnerable to disruptions.

During a merger or acquisition, clinicians may feel as though they have no control over organizational decisions. While some of these decisions may ultimately benefit them, others may add unnecessary administrative burden. For example, if an acquisition leads to adding five new hospitals into the health system, physicians shouldn't need to complete the privileging, credentialing, and enrollment process five times.

When redundancy and rework are the norm, physicians may seek employment elsewhere. Similarly, if patient access becomes problematic due to delays in credentialing, privileging, or enrollment, patients may simply seek care elsewhere. Without efficient medical staff services, health systems may experience a double whammy of provider—then patient—exodus.

An optimized MSSD reduces costs related to physician turnover and negligent credentialing settlements. The substantial cost savings generated through improved credentialing and provider enrollment staffing ratios can also promote growth in other areas of the enterprise.

Questions to evaluate whether an organization's MSSD enables or prohibits growth

The following questions can help healthcare leaders gain insight into the extent to which their organization's MSSD contributes to strategic growth:

- **What is the new clinician abandon rate?** How many new clinicians who are in the process of onboarding leave before that process is complete? The best practice benchmark is for the process to take no more than 45 days.
- **What is the established clinician turnover rate?** What reasons do clinicians cite for leaving? Do any of these reasons pertain to credentialing, privileging, and enrollment?
- **What is the rate of claim denials and write-offs?** How many of these are attributed to delays in credentialing, privileging, and enrollment?

- **How long does it take to launch a new service line?** How many days does it take, on average, from the time of creation to the first patient appointment? If the credentialing process is following best practices, it should not slow the time to launch.

Seven MSSD best practices to promote growth

Following are several best practices to help today's healthcare leaders leverage the MSSD to promote strategic growth:

1. **Centralize medical staff services operations.** Unite all necessary functions in one platform to foster consistency and reduce redundancies. Centralization also allows organizations to monitor and address bottlenecks quickly and ensure all departments are aligned with the goal of bringing clinicians on board as quickly and as smoothly as possible.
2. **Commit to ongoing improvement.** Solicit feedback and measure each clinician's experience with the MSSD. Then follow up after 2 weeks and again after 30 days of their start date to gauge their satisfaction.
3. **Create measurable key performance indicators.** Use robust reporting to support accountability and transparency. Optimize workflows by creating initial benchmarks in the application management processes. For example, ensure that credentialing primary source verification turnaround times meet or exceed the 21-day best practice benchmark.

4. **Integrate with co-dependent workflows to reduce friction and improve efficiency.** Integrate the MSSD with human resources, contracting, credentialing, provider enrollment, licensing, information technology, and revenue cycle. The goal is to create an end-to-end experience that connects the hiring process directly with credentialing and billing workflows. This alignment shortens the time to bill and enhances the experience for clinicians, who are more likely to feel supported by the organization.
5. **Dedicate resources for smooth onboarding.** Consider appointing an onboarding concierge to facilitate orientation from beginning to end. Assigning an ambassador or peer mentor can also boost engagement and reduce turnover risk.
6. **Leverage technology.** Use automated systems to increase productivity, eliminate manual tasks, and give practitioners and stakeholders access to progress made during each step of the process.
7. **Standardize workflows.** Implement best practices across the board, including adherence to benchmarks for primary source verification and other key credentialing steps to minimize delays and create a uniform experience.

Lay a foundation for growth

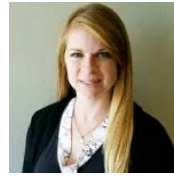
Organizations that invest in optimized medical staff services will increase clinician retention, satisfaction, and return on investment. Ultimately, they will lay the foundation that supports strategic growth.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Tina Turner, MBA,
CPMSM, CPCS**

Associate Partner



**Amanda Pierce,
MBA, CPCS,
CPMSM, PESC**

Senior Consultant