

CASE STUDY

How Independent Medical Groups Prepare Physicians for Board Service

Equipping physicians with skills and experience to excel in leadership positions

Published - October 2020 • 15 min read





Table of contents

Overview pg. 03

Approach pg. 04

1. Greensboro Radiology: A scalable physician leadership academy . .pg. 05

2. The Iowa Clinic: A customizable physician leadership institute . . . pg. 08

Related content pg. 11

Overview

The challenge

Physicians tend to step into leadership roles later in their careers and often lack the experience and skills needed to be an effective leader. For independent medical groups, this gap can be even wider, as physicians serve in strategically important roles as board members. As independent groups grow larger and the market becomes more complex, physician board members must be adept in strategic decision-making, change management, and collaborative problem-solving.

The organizations

Greensboro Radiology is an 80-physician independent radiology group in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Iowa Clinic is a 160-physician independent, multispecialty group based in Des Moines, Iowa.

The approach

Greensboro Radiology and The Iowa Clinic both partner with outside organizations to offer leadership training programs to their physicians. Both programs equip physicians with the leadership, time management, and conflict management skills needed to be effective leaders. Greensboro Radiology takes a more scalable and flexible approach to training. Alternatively, The Iowa Clinic customizes their mandatory leadership program based on the individual physician's strengths and weaknesses.

The result

Both programs equip physicians with the leadership skills and business knowledge needed to serve as effective board members. By investing in these programs, Greensboro Radiology and The Iowa Clinic have a strong pool of physician leaders to pull from when succession planning.

Approach

How independent medical groups are training future physician leaders and board members

While some organizations opt to build their own leadership programs in-house, it's often more feasible for independent groups with fewer resources to partner with outside organizations. Greensboro Radiology and The Iowa Clinic both work with external vendors to host leadership programs for their physicians, but differ in their training approaches. Greensboro Radiology offers a more flexible approach that trains the physician cohort together. The Iowa Clinic customizes their program for each physician and requires participation for future board members.

Depending on group size and available resources, independent groups typically approach leadership development in the two ways outlined in the following pages.

The two models

01 Greensboro Radiology: A scalable physician leadership academy

02 The Iowa Clinic: A customizable physician leadership institute

01 Greensboro Radiology: A scalable physician leadership academy

Greensboro Radiology employs an executive coach on retainer to run a leadership academy for their physicians—developing a deep bench of radiologist leaders. Whenever a large group of new radiologists joins, Greensboro Radiology offers this voluntary leadership program, intended to equip radiologists with the skills and perspective needed to be successful leaders.

Preparing early career physicians to take on leadership roles

Greensboro Radiology invites physicians with up to five years of tenure to apply to the academy. They attend six, three-hour-long education sessions covering a variety of leadership topics, including: offering feedback, understanding leadership roles, and active listening.

Physicians attend the courses on their own time and have the option to leave their day shifts slightly early while participating in the academy. In addition to these learning sessions, physicians participate in interactive activities to reinforce what they've learned in the classroom. Some of these activities are hands-on, such as providing positive and negative feedback to their peers in front of the group. Other exercises involve thought-provoking questions aimed at understanding the physician's goals and aspirations.



1. GREENSBORO RADIOLOGY: A SCALABLE PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP COURSE

Homework teaches physicians to value leadership work

In between training sessions, physicians complete homework to reinforce the content learned during the program. The homework is also intended to mirror the work involved in serving in leadership positions, for instance, the time commitment of serving on the board. This helps participants understand and value the effort required in leadership positions. Many radiologists in the program go on to participate in leadership positions, but even those who don't go into those roles have a greater appreciation for the work involved and understand the rationale behind business decisions.



This course **broadens the perspective** of our radiologists to all the different things involved in a radiology practice. Even if someone goes through the course and doesn't take a leadership position, that is okay, because they still gained a perspective they wouldn't have otherwise had.

Scott Wilson, Chief Operating Officer, Physician Services
Greensboro Radiology

Results

Greensboro Radiology's physician leadership academy equips promising early career physicians with the collaboration, communication, and business skills needed to be effective leaders. In addition, physicians leave the program with a better sense for the time commitment required for leadership positions.

Beyond preparing future leaders, the program also helps physicians across the entire group better understand the organization's business decisions and the importance of leadership. Even if physicians who participate don't go on to serve in leadership roles, they value the work and are encouraged to help advance the group's common goals—goals they now understand more fully. With a flexible approach to leadership education, physicians across the group can participate in the program regardless of conflicting schedules. Group activities and homework assignments ensure the participants practice their new skills together and still gain exposure to the time commitment required for leadership positions. ▽

02 The Iowa Clinic: A customizable physician leadership institute

Some independent groups are taking leadership training a step further and investing in personalized programs for their physicians. Many organizations, like The Iowa Clinic, are even making participation a requirement for board service.

Require leadership training for future board consideration

The Iowa Clinic partnered with an outside vendor to create their Physician Leadership Institute, a year-long leadership program offered every one to four years. They recruit about 15-18 participants, a majority of which are physicians, but APPs¹ and senior leaders can participate as well. Typically, all applicants are selected to participate. However, to ensure that the cohort is representative and diverse, only one physician from each department can participate at a time. Any physician with an interest in leadership can apply but participation in the program is mandatory for any physician who wants to serve on the board.

The Iowa Clinic's leadership program has two main components:

1. Individualized assessment and coaching
2. Skills practice through simulations and team projects

1. Advanced practice provider.



2. THE IOWA CLINIC: A CUSTOMIZABLE PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Individualized assessment and coaching

First, participants take an individualized assessment to understand their leadership strengths and weaknesses, with input from their peers and management. Then, each participant is paired with a coach who helps develop a personalized plan to improve their leadership and conflict management skills. The coaches support the participants throughout the program.


Skills practice through simulations and team projects

Participants then practice the leadership and management skills they're learning through simulations and team projects. These projects are hands-on, collaborative, and intended to have a direct impact on the clinic. For example, one cohort team was tasked with selecting a new patient satisfaction vendor. They took it a step further by defining their service values and developing a complementary training program—all of which are still in place today. As a multispecialty group, it's especially important for board members to come to collective decisions that benefit the larger organization, despite their different, specialty-specific backgrounds. The customizable approach to education allows participants to balance their individual growth with collaborative projects that help physicians develop and improve important skills together.

The Iowa Clinic balances the investment and demand for their robust leadership program by only offering it every two to three years. Board members serve three-year terms so the Physician Leadership Institute ensures that the group always has a strong pipeline of leaders ready to serve.

Results

The Iowa Clinic's Physician Leadership Institute teaches participants how to handle difficult conversations, solve problems innovatively, and collaborate with their peers. Participants leave the program with a deeper understanding of themselves and their fellow colleagues. They also gain knowledge of market forces and industry trends that help inform business decisions. As of September 2020, 50 physicians have completed the program so far.

While it can be challenging to quantify outcomes from leadership programs, The Iowa Clinic has seen significant results, as outlined below. 

Results for 2019 Physician Leadership Institute Class

56% Improvement in ability to deal with difficult issues and conversations

51% Improvement in ability to communicate and influence

38% Improvement in ability to build relationships with others

Related content

 TOOLKIT

Independent Medical Group
Governance Resource Library

[Read now](#)

 RESEARCH REPORT

Evolving Independent
Medical Group Governance

[Read now](#)

 WEBINAR SERIES

15-Minute Physician
Leadership Essentials

[Watch now](#)

Project director

Eliza Campbell

CampbelE@advisory.com
(202) 568-7908

Research team

Camille Bridger

Program leadership

Sarah Hostetter

LEGAL CAVEAT

Advisory Board has made efforts to verify the accuracy of the information it provides to members. This report relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and Advisory Board cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or any analysis based thereon. In addition, Advisory Board is not in the business of giving legal, medical, accounting, or other professional advice, and its reports should not be construed as professional advice. In particular, members should not rely on any legal commentary in this report as a basis for action, or assume that any tactics described herein would be permitted by applicable law or appropriate for a given member's situation. Members are advised to consult with appropriate professionals concerning legal, medical, tax, or accounting issues, before implementing any of these tactics. Neither Advisory Board nor its officers, directors, trustees, employees, and agents shall be liable for any claims, liabilities, or expenses relating to (a) any errors or omissions in this report, whether caused by Advisory Board or any of its employees or agents, or sources or other third parties, (b) any recommendation or graded ranking by Advisory Board, or (c) failure of member and its employees and agents to abide by the terms set forth herein.

Advisory Board and the "A" logo are registered trademarks of The Advisory Board Company in the United States and other countries. Members are not permitted to use these trademarks, or any other trademark, product name, service name, trade name, and logo of Advisory Board without prior written consent of Advisory Board. All other trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos used within these pages are the property of their respective holders. Use of other company trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos or images of the same does not necessarily constitute (a) an endorsement by such company of Advisory Board and its products and services, or (b) an endorsement of the company or its products or services by Advisory Board. Advisory Board is not affiliated with any such company.

IMPORTANT: Please read the following.

Advisory Board has prepared this report for the exclusive use of its members. Each member acknowledges and agrees that this report and the information contained herein (collectively, the "Report") are confidential and proprietary to Advisory Board. By accepting delivery of this Report, each member agrees to abide by the terms as stated herein, including the following:

1. Advisory Board owns all right, title, and interest in and to this Report. Except as stated herein, no right, license, permission, or interest of any kind in this Report is intended to be given, transferred to, or acquired by a member. Each member is authorized to use this Report only to the extent expressly authorized herein.
2. Each member shall not sell, license, republish, or post online or otherwise this Report, in part or in whole. Each member shall not disseminate or permit the use of, and shall take reasonable precautions to prevent such dissemination or use of, this Report by (a) any of its employees and agents (except as stated below), or (b) any third party.
3. Each member may make this Report available solely to those of its employees and agents who (a) are registered for the workshop or membership program of which this Report is a part, (b) require access to this Report in order to learn from the information described herein, and (c) agree not to disclose this Report to other employees or agents or any third party. Each member shall use, and shall ensure that its employees and agents use, this Report for its internal use only. Each member may make a limited number of copies, solely as adequate for use by its employees and agents in accordance with the terms herein.
4. Each member shall not remove from this Report any confidential markings, copyright notices, and/or other similar indicia herein.
5. Each member is responsible for any breach of its obligations as stated herein by any of its employees or agents.
6. If a member is unwilling to abide by any of the foregoing obligations, then such member shall promptly return this Report and all copies thereof to Advisory Board.



655 New York Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001
202-266-5600 | [advisory.com](https://www.advisory.com)