

Doctoring the Hospital-Doctor Relationship

In his introduction to “Empowering Physicians,” an article in this special section on physician relations, author Christopher Dadlez speaks volumes to those who read between the lines. Here is what he has to say:

“A committed and fully engaged medical staff is the lifeblood of any hospital. Yet, in today’s stressful health care climate, no hospital can take its medical staff for granted. Significant time and effort are needed to forge a culture that fosters strong partnerships between the medical staff and the hospital’s administration.”

“Speaks volumes” is a metaphorical expression, of course, but in this case, “volumes” can be read literally as well. Dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been written during the past two decades about the various efforts, some successful, some not, by health care facilities striving for a “win-win” relationship with affiliated physicians.

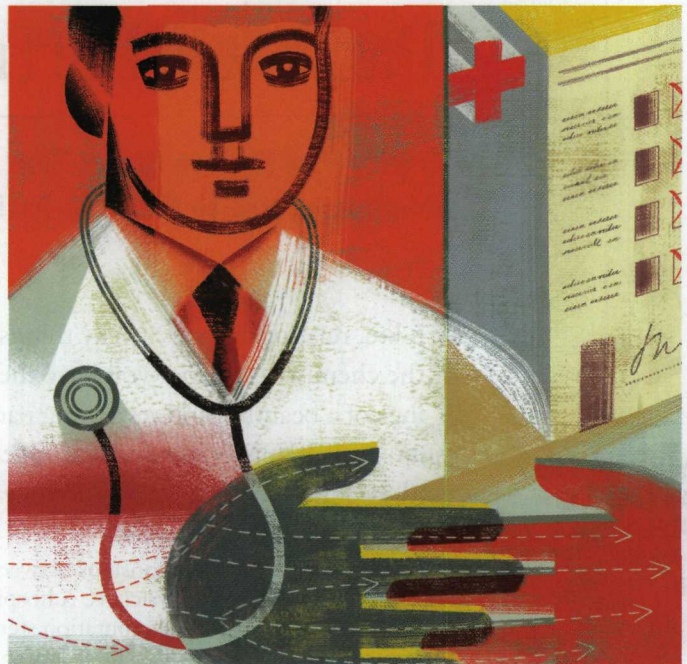
The relationship between a hospital and its physicians is symbiotic. Each obviously needs the other. Yet the distinct challenges each group faces inevitably lead to tensions.

Physicians want assurance of stable incomes to offset declining compensation and escalating insurance costs. They want to associate with facilities noted for quality. They want time for a life outside of work. Many want expensive state-of-the-art equipment and technology that may or may not be of proven benefit to patients.

Hospitals, faced with their own cost-related pressures, and dependent on physician referrals for income, seek contractual evidence of loyalty, more so than ever now, when entrepreneurial physicians are tempted to invest in outpatient facilities that duplicate — and often compete with — services hospitals provide.

The stakes go up with frequent predictions of growing physician shortages, particularly in primary care, as baby boomers age and demands on health care grow.

Our articles offer a representative sampling of strategies in place at Catholic facilities aimed at attracting and strengthening ties with physicians — the vital professionals who, in our



market-obsessed culture, are sometimes described as one of a hospital’s key “customer” groups. The strategies range from giving physicians a greater voice in governance to installing comprehensive electronic patient record systems to providing voluntary programs to assist physicians in their personal growth.

Interspersed with our articles are readings that underscore the foundational elements of mission and values that have traditionally drawn some of our nation’s best physicians to align with Catholic health care. The readings include a homily by Fr. Donald Senior, CP, on Jesus as a Christian healer’s touchstone, and a series of quotations labeled “Voices,” which appear along the sides of the following pages. The quotations are excerpted from interviews with physicians, sponsors and administrators in preparation for an online video resource to be posted on CHA’s website this fall. ■

— Pamela Schaeffer, Ph.D., editor,
Health Progress