



**Physician
alignment,
engagement,
and
retention**

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A roadmap for healthcare administrators

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Introduction from the author

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”
—Albert Einstein



Physician alignment, engagement, and retention are critical to delivering high-quality patient care, maintaining operational stability, and reducing recruitment costs. Yet, healthcare executives nationwide face significant challenges in this area:

- Their physicians are unengaged and burned out
- They struggle to align physicians with their organization’s administrative and strategic priorities.
- They feel like they’re regularly losing physicians they’ve invested hundreds of thousands of dollars—or more—to recruit and onboard

Do you relate? If so, you’re not alone. This is an industry-wide problem:

- Only 23% of healthcare organizations have a formal physician retention plan in place, despite widespread turnover and rising recruitment costs ([AAPPR](#), 2024).
- One in 2 physicians reported feeling burned out ([Medscape](#), 2024).

Not long ago, I was in your shoes as a C-suite executive at a larger rural healthcare system in Wisconsin. I know how frustrating and disheartening these challenges are. But let me share some good news with you: They’re not insurmountable.

This roadmap is designed to share the strategies, tactics, and best practices that drive physician **alignment, engagement, and retention**. In it, you’ll find:

- **Proven strategies to improve physician engagement and retention**
Best practices for fostering a culture that supports, motivates, and aligns physicians with your organization’s goals
- **Data-driven insights and benchmarking tools**
Key metrics, industry trends, and self-assessment checklists to evaluate your organization’s current physician alignment efforts
- **Practical resources**
Case studies, discussion questions, and a step-by-step framework to guide you as you implement sustainable improvements in physician relationships

Understanding what your physicians need from you will allow you to amplify their service and yours in a way that advances your organization’s goals.

I hope you find the roadmap and its content valuable as you embark on taking physician alignment, engagement, and retention to the next level within your organization. Your physicians, staff, leaders—and most importantly—your patients deserve this work to be one of your top strategic priorities for 2025 and beyond.

We wish you luck and hope you find this resource useful!

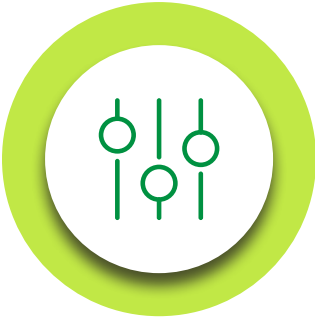


Scott Polenz

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Understanding physician alignment, engagement, and retention

Alignment, engagement, and retention are distinct but interconnected strategies that support organizational performance and patient care. The chart below outlines what each term means and how they work together to strengthen your physician workforce.



Physician alignment

Alignment happens when physicians share and support your organization’s mission, vision, and values. It’s built through trust, transparency, and a sense of shared purpose between medical staff and leadership.

When physicians are aligned, they’re more likely to work collaboratively toward common goals, driving improvements in patient care, operational efficiency, and long-term growth.



Physician engagement

Engagement measures how connected physicians feel to their work and workplace. Engaged physicians feel heard, respected, and included in decision-making—especially in matters that impact patient care.

By fostering a culture of collaboration and open communication, healthcare organizations can strengthen physician commitment, boost morale, and enhance both clinical and organizational performance.



Physician retention

Retention is about creating the conditions that make physicians want to stay, through supportive leadership, manageable workloads, meaningful recognition, and growth opportunities. As physician shortages continue to rise, retaining talent is more critical than ever.

High turnover not only disrupts care and burdens teams but can also come at a steep financial cost. Investing in retention protects continuity of care, preserves institutional knowledge, and strengthens your organization’s overall stability and performance.

Why it matters

A business case for investment in physician alignment, engagement, and retention

Physician alignment, engagement, and retention are critical to your organization’s mission and financial success. The data proves it.

The cost of losing just one physician is as high as \$1 million. Surgical specialists can easily exceed this amount, costing several million dollars if a high-billing surgeon’s slot stays open for a year.

More than one-third of physicians say they intend to leave their current practice within the next 12 months, and 13% will ultimately do so.

If your organization has 1,000 physicians and 13% leave in 2025, **your combined turnover costs could exceed \$130 million in expenses and lost clinical revenue in just one year.**

Given these stakes, **physician retention efforts have the potential to create overwhelmingly positive ROI.** Preventing even one physician departure can save an organization hundreds of thousands of dollars and avoid months of productivity loss. It also spares the remaining team the strain of an extended vacancy. Luckily, you can take action to prevent these critical losses.

Addressing turnover can yield a 5 - 10% immediate improvement in retention simply by signaling to physicians that the organization cares and is taking action.

There is broad consensus that healthcare executives must treat physician turnover as a strategic priority—not simply an HR issue, but a core business risk.

Like any business priority, long-term results often require an upfront investment of resources. For example, dedicating \$50,000 to physician wellness and engagement could prevent a departure that could have cost the organization ten- to twentyfold.

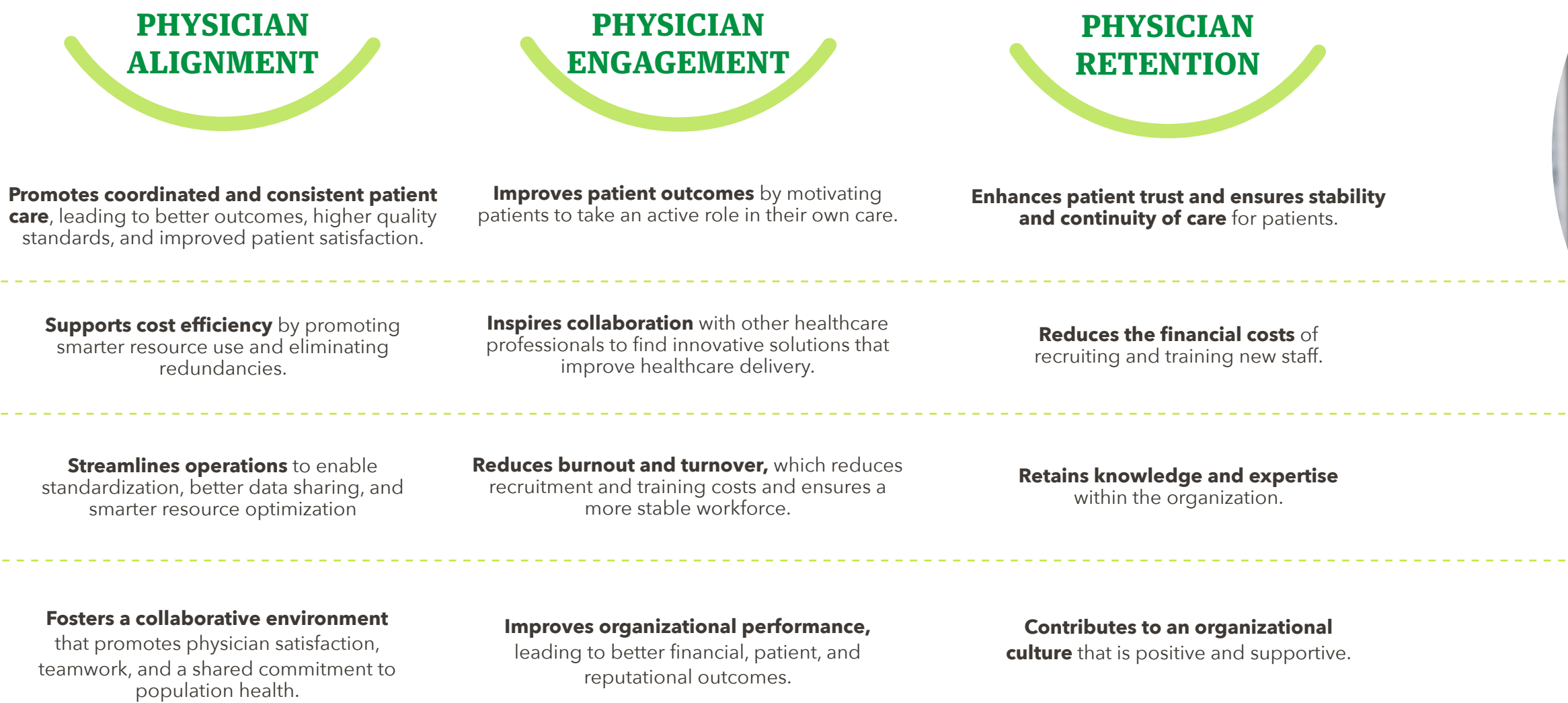
Additionally, investing in physician engagement and retention can generate revenue. An engaged physician is 26% more productive than a disengaged colleague, generating significant additional revenue each year and strengthening the organization’s financial health and long-term sustainability.

A case for patient, physician, and organizational success

The benefits of investing in physicians aren't only financial. A focus on physician alignment, engagement, and retention is also instrumental in achieving the Quadruple Aim of healthcare:

- Improve patient experience
- Improve population health
- Reduce costs
- Improve provider well-being

Below are some of the benefits of focusing on physician alignment, engagement, and retention—from improved patient experience to streamlined facility operations.



Physician alignment

Alignment grows organically as physicians and executive leaders identify common goals and acknowledge that they have a shared purpose. The result? Better patient care, efficiency, growth, and cost effectiveness.

Focusing on the following areas will improve alignment between your organization, its leadership, and your physicians:

- Culture
- Executive leadership
- Communication
- Physician voice and leadership

Culture

Strategic reflection: What is your value proposition to current and prospective physicians—and what truly sets your organization apart as a place to practice medicine?

“Culture outperforms strategy every time; and culture with strategy is unbeatable”
— Quint Studer



Organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping the physician experience, impacting everything from job satisfaction to patient outcomes. A strong, positive culture supports collaboration, reduces burnout, and helps attract and retain top talent.

Key benefits include:

- **Improved work environment**
Positive culture boosts morale, reduces stress, and increases physician job satisfaction.
- **Better patient care**
Collaborative and communicative environments foster safer, more coordinated care and stronger outcomes.
- **Talent attraction and retention**
Physicians are more likely to join and stay with organizations where they feel valued, respected, and supported.
- **Commitment to growth**
Cultures that prioritize learning and improvement help physicians stay current and continuously raise the quality of care.

Checkpoint: Culture

- ✓ Does your organization conduct an annual engagement survey?
- ✓ If so, do you include specific questions regarding your organization’s culture?
- ✓ Do you also conduct pulse surveys throughout the year?
- ✓ Does your organization regularly implement action plans to improve engagement scores?
- ✓ Have you implemented any new policies or changes in response to engagement results?
- ✓ Do you incorporate your mission, vision, and values into day-to-day patient care, including your evaluation process?

Executive leadership

Strategic reflection: On a scale of 1 to 10, what number would your physicians give in their trust of your executive leadership?

Effective leadership is essential in today’s complex healthcare environment, which is shaped by rapid innovation, shifting regulations, and changing patient expectations. Strong leaders build trust, foster collaboration, and create a culture centered on teamwork and patient care, all of which drive better outcomes.

Certain leadership qualities are especially important for strengthening physician alignment and engagement. While your executive team likely demonstrates many of these already, identifying gaps and developing these skills further can enhance physician relationships and organizational performance.

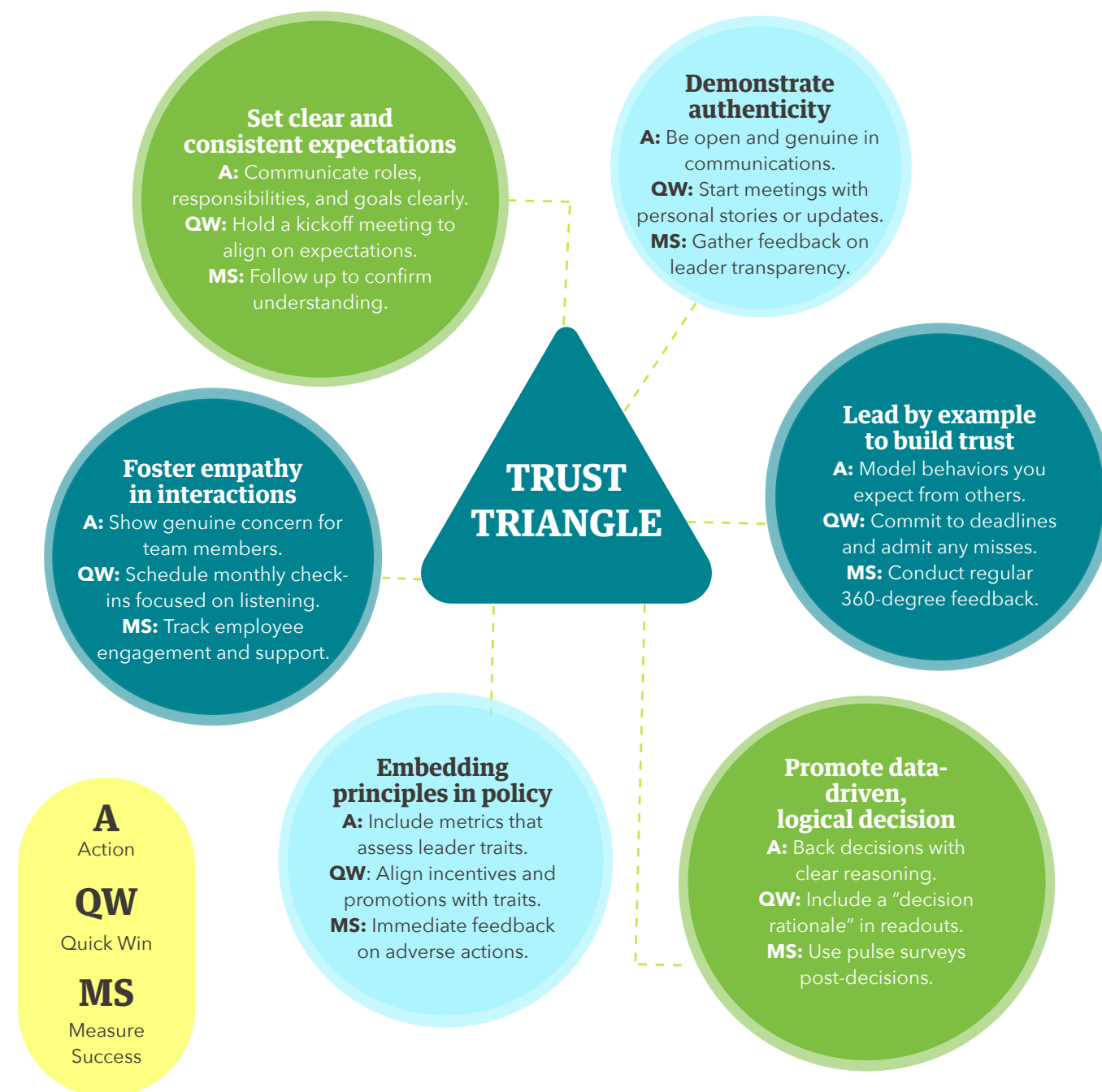
- **Visionary thinking**
Leaders must anticipate future challenges and opportunities—from emerging diseases to new technologies—and guide their organizations with a clear, forward-looking vision.
- **Decisiveness and agility**
In a fast-paced, high-stakes environment, strong leaders make timely decisions and adapt quickly to changing conditions, such as public health crises or evolving patient needs.
- **Empathy and compassion**
Healthcare is, at its core, a service to humanity. Understanding the perspectives of patients and staff enables leaders to make more humane, informed decisions that support a culture of care.
- **Communication skills**
Clear, effective communication with staff, patients, regulators, and the public is essential to building trust and driving alignment.
- **Integrity**
Upholding high ethical standards is non-negotiable in healthcare, where confidentiality, trust, and accountability are paramount.



- ✓ **Checkup:** Executive leadership
Does your engagement survey include questions about trust and alignment with your executive leadership?
- ✓ Do you have a clear and compelling vision that reframes what winning looks like, and is it owned by the whole enterprise? Do physicians know how they help the organization win?
- ✓ Do you utilize a dyad model of leadership partnering a physician with an administrator?
- ✓ Is your executive team the right size, comprising people with complementary skills and characterized by an 'enterprise first' mindset?
- ✓ Have you built trust with your physicians by being 'radically transparent' and showing an interest in their views?
- ✓ Does your executive team round on a regular cadence and do they/you partner on follow up on concerns and questions? Does your executive team conduct regional town halls?

Deeper dive: Executive leadership

Below are six immediate actions that can be communicated to measure and obtain quick wins.



“Building trust does not require a roadmap, but a commitment to behaviors in every interaction across the organization.”

Communication

Communication done well leads to better trust and collaboration, boosting engagement and retention. These outcomes, in turn, lead to better patient care. A strong communication strategy should include both formal channels (like press releases or newsletters), and informal touchpoints (like one-on-one conversations or unscripted remarks).

Strategic reflection: Does your communication with physicians, staff, leaders, and community members consistently lead with your mission, vision, values, and the “why” behind your work?

While operational updates—memos, emails, decks—are important for clarity and execution, driving engagement requires authenticity. Messages that convey shared purpose, explain the “why” behind key decisions, and highlight real stories of impact help physicians feel connected to the organization and the patients they serve. Communication ideas to consider:

- Send a weekly or monthly email with key operational, cultural, and organizational updates.
- Host brief, regular meetings—virtual or in-person—to share timely updates and reinforce transparency.
- Partner with your communications team to share written or video stories that highlight physicians’ impact.
- Hold small-group listening sessions to hear directly from physicians about challenges and successes.

- Communicate changes thoughtfully. Consider timing, tone, delivery method, and follow-up. Ask for support from communications professionals when needed.
- Be intentional about who delivers the message. For sensitive topics, consider having a trusted physician leader speak to their peers.
- Anticipate tough questions. Address the most difficult or uncomfortable ones proactively.

Checkup: Communications

- ✓ Do you have a formal physician communication plan?
- ✓ Does your organization have the support of an internal communications team to assist with physician communications, even if on just a consultative basis?
- ✓ Does your organization have a regular newsletter, email, meeting, or other way of communicating formally with physicians?
- ✓ Do you carefully consider what information your physicians need or want to know?
- ✓ Are your communications with physicians reactive or proactive?
- ✓ Do you enhance your communications with engaging stories that are relevant to physicians?

Deeper dive: Communication

We recommend that you implement the framework of tactics adopted by CHG’s executive team to execute its communication strategy.

	Purpose	Owner	Cadence
All hands system-wide meetings	Deliver top priorities and asks to organization	CHRO/CMO + communications	10 – 12 virtual meetings; one in-person annually
Leader communications	Share what leaders need to know	CHRO/CMO + communications	Bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly
C-suite blog	Recaps, industry insights, breaking news, change management	CEO + rotating executive	Biweekly
C-suite personality	Share personal stories to create deeper connection with employees	C-suite	Annual, per executive
Onboarding visibility	Immediate interaction with new employees during onboarding	C-suite	Biweekly
Feedback & open door policy	Ask Me Anything and open-door policy for any employee to provide feedback	C-suite	Ongoing



“Communication is not about great-looking PowerPoint slides or a wonderfully written memo. It is about connection. It is about authenticity. It is about transparency. It is about being real and humble.”
— Scott Polenz

Physician voice and leadership

No patient walks into the doors of a healthcare facility to see an administrator. They seek clinical advice and services from physicians and their teams. But despite the indispensable role physicians play, many healthcare systems treat them like a commodity, even if unintentionally.

When physicians have influence and feel their voice matters, they're more likely to feel valued, engaged, and invested in the organization's success. Yet, despite a desire for involvement in organizational decisions (72%), less than half of physicians feel that their input is actively solicited (40%) or incorporated into decision-making (44%), according to CHG's Physician Sentiment Survey.

One proven way to elevate the physician voice is through the dyad leadership model, which pairs a physician leader with a non-physician administrative leader to co-lead strategic and operational decisions. Physicians guide the clinical vision, while administrators manage business operations like resource planning and financial strategy.

Strategic reflection: Do your decision-making processes include input from practicing physicians on issues that impact patient care? If not, what's preventing their involvement?

This partnership allows each leader to contribute their expertise, balancing clinical and operational priorities. The model can help communicate a powerful message: Physicians are essential partners, and their perspectives—as clinicians and people—truly matter. The dyad model requires investment, trust, and commitment to align goals and improve accountability, but the empowerment it gives physicians will pay off in organizational success.

Checkpoint: Physician voice and leadership

- ✓ Do you involve physicians in key decisions that will impact their practice in the ambulatory and/or hospital settings?
- ✓ When you implement a change in a clinical setting that will impact your physicians is the communications led by physician to physician(s)?
- ✓ Do you have a formal physician leadership development program?
- ✓ Do you have a formal process to identify future physician leaders?
- ✓ Do you assess the impact of physician leadership on patient care and satisfaction?
- ✓ Do you track key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of physician leadership?

Deeper dive: Physician voice & leadership

The dyad model aligns goals and improves accountability across a company, but requires time investment, trust, and commitment to growth to succeed





Physician engagement

While both physician engagement and alignment aim to improve healthcare outcomes, engagement focuses more on the emotional connection physicians feel to their organization. It's about fostering an environment where physicians feel valued, empowered, and heard—especially in decisions affecting their work and patients.

When physicians are engaged, the impact is far reaching; referral leakage is reduced, in-network referrals increase, and patients are more likely to stay actively involved in their care. Engagement also supports stronger physician performance and development, improves care delivery, and helps lower rates of burnout and turnover.

In this section, we will explore four key areas of physician engagement:

- Onboarding
- Work-life balance and flexibility
- Operational efficiency
- Collegiality and socialization

Onboarding

Strategic reflection: Would a physician have a different onboarding experience at one hospital or region within your system vs. another? If yes, why?

A formal, well-structured onboarding program is a key driver of physician engagement. It helps new physicians feel confident, connected, and supported, enabling them to integrate into the organization's culture and workflow more quickly. Data shows that physicians with a positive onboarding experience are nearly [three times more likely to report high job satisfaction](#) and significantly less likely to feel dissatisfied.

The benefits extend beyond the individual; strong onboarding boosts productivity, strengthens collaboration, and supports better patient care. To achieve these outcomes, consider the following onboarding best practices:

- Onboarding activities should be consistent across your system.
- Onboarding should be high-touch with both local and executive leadership involved in the process and in welcoming new physicians.
- A person or a team should be assigned to own the onboarding program and experience.
- Onboarding should consider the physician's family and include opportunities to introduce them to the community.

Checkup: Onboarding

- ✓ Do you have a formal onboarding program in place across your whole system of care?
- ✓ Do you have one person or team who "owns" the onboarding program?
- ✓ Do you conduct an onboarding survey for the physician as well as the hiring department and leadership?
- ✓ How do you hold local/regional leadership accountable for fulfilling their elements of the onboarding experience?
- ✓ Is executive leadership supportive of the onboarding program?
- ✓ Do you have any activities for the physician's family to help welcome and orient them to the community? Is there a social component in your program?

“Physician onboarding isn’t a formality. It’s a cultural lynchpin.”

— American Medical Association

Deeper dive: Onboarding

Roles:



Journey stage:



Activities:

- Workforce planning
- Sourcing
- Interview
- Contract
- Application
- Primary source verification
- Privileging
- Candidate / operations status updates
- Relocation
- HR onboarding
- Orientation planning
- Practice setup
- Marketing campaigns
- Orientation
- Service line alignment
- Departmental relations
- Cultural immersion
- Professional growth and development
- MD wellness
- Stay interviews
- Socialization
- Retention strategies

Work-life balance and flexibility

“The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head.”

— William Osler

Promoting work-life balance and flexibility is essential for physician well-being, job satisfaction, and quality of care. Executive leaders can support this by creating flexible schedules, offering alternative practice models, and fostering a culture that values well-being and sustainability. Even simple changes, like rotating demanding shifts or reducing administrative burdens, can significantly reduce stress and improve retention.

Key strategies to consider:

- **Flexible scheduling**
Provide physicians with more control over their hours through part-time options, shift rotations, or reduced schedules.
- **Alternative practice models**
Explore job sharing, telehealth, and other flexible arrangements to support personal and professional balance.
- **Work-life integration**
Encourage a culture that prioritizes well-being and respects life outside of work.
- **Hybrid work options**
Incorporate remote or telemedicine roles, where possible, to allow for more autonomy.
- **Promote self-care**
Support mental and physical well-being through peer support, time off, and wellness initiatives.
- **Leadership training**
Equip physicians with leadership skills to advocate for balance and drive positive change.

Strategic reflection: Does your healthcare organization create a culture that values physician balance and flexibility or lean towards treating physicians like a commodity?

Checkpoint: Work-life balance and flexibility

- ✓ Does your organization have a formal flexible-scheduling program?
- ✓ Does your organization formalize the flexible program for fairness and consistency across your organization?
- ✓ Does your organization have an offboarding for physicians getting close to retirement?
- ✓ What kind of parental leave does your organization offer? Childcare services?
- ✓ Has your organization recently reevaluated your paid time off benefit package? Could you be more generous in what you offer, including floating holidays, sick time, or volunteer time off?
- ✓ Do you have structures and/or programs in place to support physicians when they do take time off?

Operational efficiency

Strategic reflection: How does your organization empower physicians to be leaders in operational improvement, rather just than being asked to adapt to change?

Many of the challenges that reduce physician satisfaction, and ultimately impact patient care, stem from operational inefficiencies in daily practice. Burdensome EHR systems, conflicting demands from third-party payers, and a lack of support from leadership can all contribute to frustration, burnout, and disengagement. But executive leaders can make a meaningful difference by addressing these pain points with targeted, strategic solutions.

- **Engage physicians as strategic partners:** Include physicians in decision-making, communicate transparently, create opportunities for physicians to influence organizational priorities, and build trust through meaningful collaboration.

“ I think a lot of docs feel that ‘I went to medical school, I did the training, I understand how to take care of patients,’ and now there is a push for doing something a certain way because it is less expensive or some government program has said that this arbitrary quality marker is important. ”

— KrisEmily McCrory, MD

- **Remove barriers to efficiency**
Provide the right tools, staffing, and systems to help physicians focus on patient care.
- **Fix what isn’t working--starting with EHRs**
Prioritize physician feedback and usability when refining EHR systems to reduce administrative burden.
- **Address conflicting demands from payers**
Support physicians in navigating prior authorizations and denials with better processes and advocacy.

Checkpoint: Operational efficiency

- ✓ Do you optimize physician time by minimizing unnecessary tasks and focusing efforts where they’re most impactful? Do you have efforts to reduce administrative paperwork for clinicians?
- ✓ Do you simplify health information management (HIM) to support efficient, accessible care?
- ✓ Do you streamline the patient intake process to improve the experience for both patients and physicians?
- ✓ Do you support strong care collaboration to improve patient outcomes?
- ✓ Do you choose technology partners that understand and prioritize clinical efficiency and outcomes?
- ✓ Do you truly involve physicians in taskforces or initiatives focused on operational efficiency?

Deeper dive: Autonomy matters



Clinical autonomy
I can make decisions that are best for my patients.



Schedule autonomy
I can spend my days in a way that works for my patients, my family, and myself.



Strategic autonomy
I can help shape the practice’s future direction.

Information courtesy of Advisory Board

#1 Autonomy is the top attribute that physicians value in their current role according to 2022 Advisory Board survey data.

Collegiality and socialization

“More than ever, the social leadership of the right brain (inspiring and motivating) are what gives others hope.”

— Gary Burnison, CEO, Korn Ferry



Strong relationships between physicians can significantly influence job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being. Collegiality—the sense of mutual respect, cooperation, and support among peers—helps create a culture where physicians thrive. Socialization—how physicians learn norms, values, and behaviors—builds professional identity and connection. Both are critical to a well-functioning healthcare system.

Healthcare leaders can foster connection in formal and informal ways, from establishing mentorship programs to creating relaxed, welcoming spaces and events where physicians and their families can build relationships.

Beyond morale, these relationships have operational and financial implications. When physicians know and trust their peers across the system, they’re more likely to refer patients internally, which aids the continuity of care and patient retention.

Strategic reflection: Does your organization believe in and tie socialization and collegiality to patient retention?

Ideas to foster collegiality and socialization



Mentorship programs
Pair new or early-career physicians with experienced colleagues to support clinical growth, professional development, and system integration.



Cross-specialty case discussions
Create regular opportunities for physicians across departments to collaborate on complex cases and learn from one another’s perspectives.



Physician lounges and shared space
Invest in welcoming, well-appointed spaces where physicians can connect informally between cases or shifts.



Onboarding with peer introductions
Include structured opportunities for new physicians to meet colleagues across the system, not just in their own department.



Social gatherings and family events
Host relaxed, inclusive events like picnics, game nights, or holiday celebrations to build relationships beyond clinical settings.









Protected time for peer engagement
Build time into schedules for team check-ins, shared lunches, or interdisciplinary discussions to foster connection during work hours.



Community-building committees
Form physician-led groups to plan events, guide wellness initiatives, and shape a culture of connection.

Checkpoint: Collegiality and socialization

- 
 Do you have a formal social program team focused on getting physicians together outside of work?
- 
 Are there social events (dinners, retreats, etc.) sponsored and attended by executive leadership?
- 
 Do you have social gatherings (virtual or face to face) across your system to promote collegiality and internal education on services offered to promote/expect internal referrals?
- 
 Does your organization have a formal spousal program?
- 
 Do you have a formal mentoring program for new physicians?
- 
 Does your onboarding program include new physician meet and greets?

Physician retention

As any leader in healthcare knows, physicians are becoming harder to recruit, and even harder to retain, as the national shortage deepens. In this environment, retention isn't just about keeping headcount. It's a strategic imperative. The financial impact of turnover is substantial, including recruitment costs, lost revenue, and time spent onboarding.

The non-financial effects are equally significant; remaining physicians face increased workloads, patient access and continuity suffer, and institutional knowledge is lost. Retaining physicians means maintaining stability, protecting team culture, and preserving quality of care.

Investing in certain areas can increase retention rates significantly. A retention strategy should include a focus on the following:

- Professional growth and development
- Well-being
- Compensation and incentives
- Recognition

“
While the journey seems long and hard at the beginning, with perseverance and dedication, the rewards last a lifetime.
 ”
 — Dr. William R. Francis




Professional growth and development

Strategic reflection: Does your organization recognize that all physicians are leaders of their respective teams, even without a leadership title?


Physician professional development—including continuing medical education (CME), leadership training, mentorship, and career planning—is essential for maintaining clinical excellence and fostering growth within the organization. Providing robust CME opportunities help physicians stay current and improve patient care, while leadership development programs empower them to take on broader roles and influence organizational success.

Physicians are lifelong learners. By investing in these areas and engaging physicians in ongoing career conversations, healthcare organizations demonstrate a strong commitment to their physicians' growth and future. This not only enhances job satisfaction and loyalty but also strengthens retention and builds a pipeline of capable physician leaders.


Examples of professional development opportunities



Continuing medical education (CME) courses
 Can be online, in person, or hybrid and cover a wide range of topics.




Conferences and meetings
 Offer opportunities to learn from experts and network with colleagues.



Research and publication
 Contribute to the advancement of knowledge and improve the quality of care.



Workshops and seminars
 Provide hands-on experience and interactive learning.



Journal clubs and reading groups
 Foster critical thinking and discussion of important medical literature.

Checkpoint: Professional growth and development

- ✓ Do you have a formal mentorship program?
- ✓ How do you identify future physician leaders to shape them as future leaders?
- ✓ Do you have a formal physician leadership development program?
- ✓ Is your CME budget competitive?
- ✓ Do you have formal internal clinical educational programs for your physicians to partake in and learn from one another?
- ✓ Do you conduct an annual evaluation of your physicians? Do all your physicians have a formal professional development system in place?



Well-being

Strategic reflection: Does your organization have a formal well-being program for your physicians led by a chief well-being officer?

Physician well-being encompasses physical, mental, emotional, and social health, reflecting a physician’s ability to thrive professionally and personally while finding meaning and satisfaction in their work. Yet, only 42% of physicians feel their executive leadership genuinely cares about their wellness (Physician Sentiment Survey, CHG), and [nearly half of U.S. physicians report experiencing burnout](#). These factors can contribute to increased stress, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates.

Supporting physician well-being requires a holistic approach: fostering a supportive culture, enhancing individual and team resilience, and addressing systemic drivers of burnout. Key strategies include clear communication, streamlined workflows, access to mental health and wellness resources, and ongoing assessment of well-being. By prioritizing these factors, organizations can improve physician health, boost job satisfaction, and strengthen retention.

“Physicians’ ability to see their own values represented in the work that they do is a significant factor in feeling as though they are making a positive difference in the world.”

— Behavioral Health & Wellness Program, University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus School of Medicine

Deeper dive: Well-being

Organizational support

- Leadership commitment
- Open communication
- Wellness-centered leadership
- Regular review of operations
- Well-being team

Organizational factors

- Workflow improvements
- Meaningful work
- Adequate resources
- Leadership development
- Psychological safety
- Equity

Resilience and well-being

- Supportive forums
- Peer support
- Mental health access
- Individual self-care
- Resilience workshops
- Work-life integration

Measurement and evaluation

- Leader behavior assessment
- Feedback collection
- Improvements in well-being
- Long-term plan creation



Checkup: Well-being

- ✓ Does your organization have a formal well-being structure and program led by a chief well-being officer or other executive?
- ✓ Does your organization have a dedicated budget for physician well-being?
- ✓ What kind of mental health resources do your physicians have access to and are they encouraged to use them?
- ✓ Are there operational challenges at your organization that could be contributing to physician frustration and burnout?
- ✓ Do you have a physician-led well-being committee?
- ✓ What methods do you use to collect feedback from physicians about their well-being?

“People pay the doctor for his trouble; for his kindness, they still remain in his debt.”

— Seneca

Compensation and incentives

Physician compensation is a critical lever that influences not only recruitment and retention but also physician behavior and engagement. However, many traditional models focus heavily on volume and productivity, which may conflict with evolving goals around quality, patient satisfaction, and cost effectiveness. To foster alignment, compensation plans should balance financial rewards with incentives that promote the organization’s mission and long-term success.

Research from the [American Medical Association](#) (AMA) also shows that compensation tied to quality and patient experience metrics improves physician engagement and aligns care delivery with value-based goals. Yet, only about half of physicians felt their compensation model fairly reflected their contribution to patient care and organizational goals, according to a recent physician survey from [Medscape](#).

Strategic reflection: Do your physicians know how they get paid? Would your executive team accept not knowing how their salary is paid? If not, why should your physicians accept it?

Checkup: Compensation and incentives

- ✓ What is your compensation philosophy, and does it align with your strategic plan?
- ✓ Do your physicians adapt and succeed when they transition from a guaranteed salary to productivity-based compensation?
- ✓ How does the compensation model incentivize physicians to improve patient outcomes, reduce costs, and enhance the patient experience?
- ✓ How does the compensation model address the challenges of physician burnout and work-life balance and engagement?
- ✓ What is the plan to adapt the compensation model to changing reimbursement models and regulatory requirements?
- ✓ Do you have a compensation committee with physician involvement and input and how do physicians feel about the current compensation model?

Recognition

Physician recognition plays a vital role in fostering engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction. When physicians feel genuinely valued and appreciated, it strengthens their connection to the organization and encourages continued commitment to high-quality patient care. Recognition can take many forms, ranging from formal awards and incentive programs to informal acknowledgments and everyday expressions of gratitude.

National physician recognition programs

- AMA Physician’s Recognition Award
- AMA Excellence in Medicine Awards
- AMA “Joy in Medicine” Recognition Program
- National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) Recognition Programs

Formal organizational recognition programs

- Annual award ceremonies recognizing excellence in clinical care, innovation, leadership, or teaching
- Structured nomination and voting processes involving peers and leadership
- Public acknowledgment through newsletters, intranet posts, or special events
- Awards aligned with organizational values and strategic goals

Informal recognition ideas

- Peer-to-peer recognition platforms for colleagues to highlight each other’s efforts
- Small tokens of appreciation, such as lunches, treats, or gift cards
- Handwritten thank-you notes from leaders or peers
- Spot bonuses to reward exceptional contributions in real time

Strategic reflection: When is the last time you and your executive teammates said these simple but powerful words to one of your practicing physicians: “Thank you, Dr. X”?

One organization has a formal Shining Star program where patients, staff, and leaders can recognize physicians with a donation to their foundation. The presentations are powerful and often emotional for all involved. Formal and informal recognition boosts morale and promotes a culture of appreciation that benefits the entire healthcare team.

Checkout: Recognition

- ✓ What kind of formal recognition programs do you have for your physicians?
- ✓ How do your physicians feel valued and recognized throughout their careers?
- ✓ Do you hold an annual awards program for your physicians?
- ✓ What opportunities do you provide for employees at your organization to recognize physicians?
- ✓ Do executive leaders in your organization make it a regular habit to express appreciation to physicians in writing?
- ✓ Do you find opportunities to recognize physicians for their work in your organization’s communications channels?

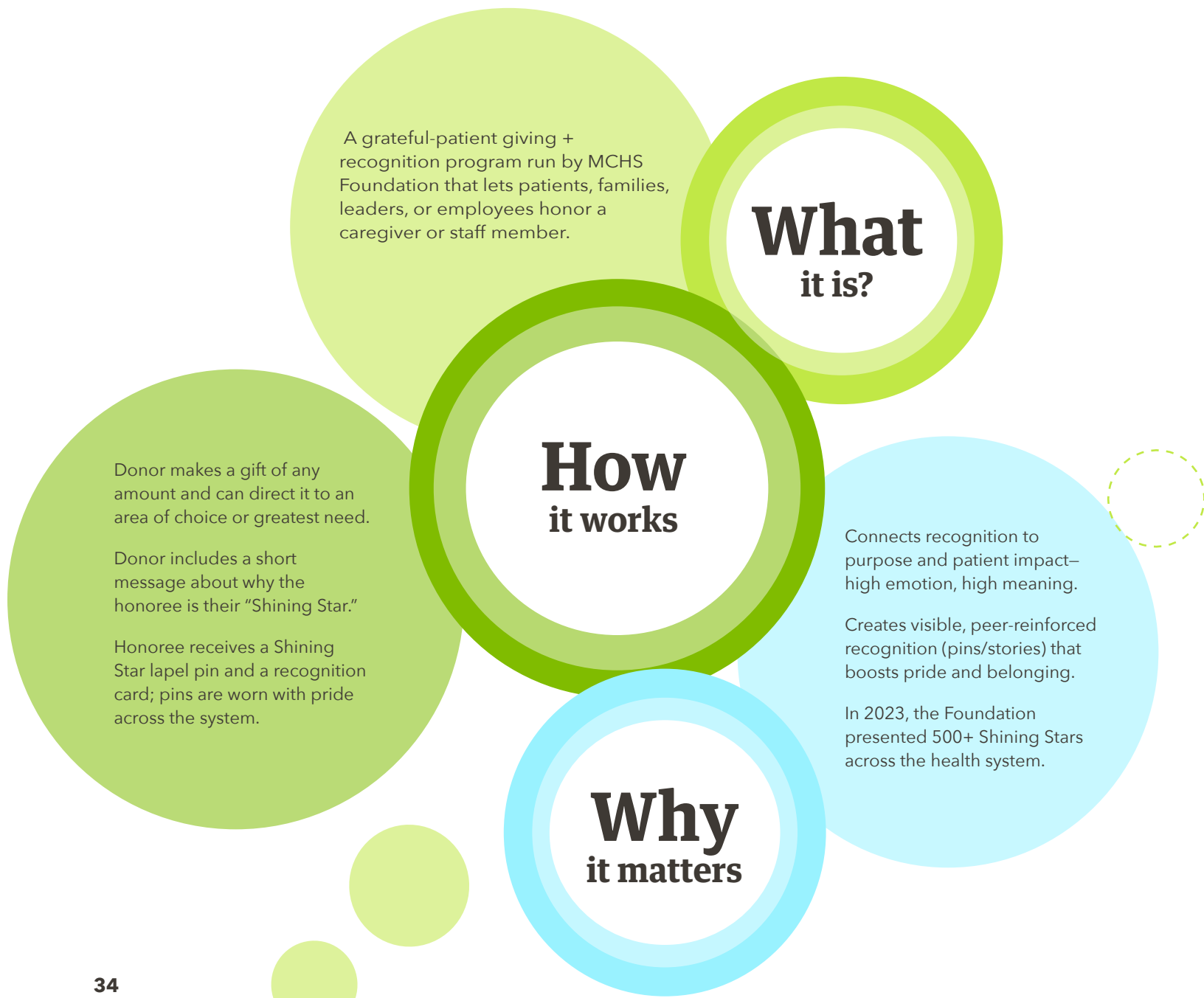
“Recognition is not a scarce resource. You can’t use it up or run out of it.”
— Anonymous



Deeper Dive: Recognition

Highlighting the “Shining Star” recognition program from Marshfield Clinic Health System

“Because of you, I felt seen and safe.
Thank you for being my Shining Star.”
— Grateful patient



Establishing an office of physician relations

You may be wondering where to begin the overwhelming task of integrating physician alignment, engagement, and retention in a strategic and effective way.

One approach that has proven successful for many healthcare organizations is the creation of an office of physician relations. This office typically pairs an administrative leader (such as a vice president of physician and APP relations) with a physician leader (such as a chief well-being officer) in a dyad partnership.

The office of physician relations serves as a centralized, physician-specific resource helping physicians navigate the often complex and fragmented systems within healthcare

organizations. Rather than spending valuable time tracking down answers across multiple departments, physicians can turn to a single point of contact who understands their unique needs and challenges.

Whether it’s support for onboarding, credentialing, compensation questions, burnout resources, or leadership development, the office ensures that physicians have direct access to the tools, information, and advocacy they need to succeed and feel supported.



Conclusion: A call to lead with intention

The challenges of physician alignment, engagement, and retention may feel complex, but they are not insurmountable. This roadmap was built on the experience and belief that healthcare organizations can make meaningful, lasting change with the right strategies, committed leadership, and a clear understanding of what physicians need.

The entire organization benefits when physicians feel aligned with your mission, engaged in their work, and supported by your leadership. Patient care improves. Operational performance stabilizes. Morale strengthens. And perhaps most importantly, physicians are more likely to stay.

As you move forward, use this roadmap not just as a reference, but as a catalyst to spark new conversations, guide decisions, and inspire a renewed commitment to your physicians.

Because when physicians thrive, your organization does too.

Let's get to work.

*Are there areas related to physician engagement and retention you'd like to improve within your organization? CHG Healthcare Advisory Services can help. Contact **866.570.9920** or advisoryservices@chghealthcare.com*

Take the healthcare executive assessment

This free assessment aims to identify strengths and areas for improvement in physician alignment, engagement, and retention within your organization.

Scan the QR code below to complete this short questionnaire.

After you submit your responses, CHG's Advisory Services team will analyze them to develop targeted strategies for your organization. These strategies will be shared with you during a free consultation.

Organizational Assessment of Physician Alignment, Engagement & Retention



2-minute survey Please provide contact info and answer 15 quick, multiple-choice assessment questions.

About Advisory Services

Your path to a future-ready workforce begins with a future-focused partner.

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About CHG Healthcare

As the nation's leading physician workforce experts, CHG Healthcare makes it possible for over 20 million patients to access timely, high-quality care through our network of providers and partners each year.

CHG created the locum tenens industry, and we have continuously evolved and transformed it for more than forty years. Far beyond locum tenens, our solutions span the clinical workforce spectrum, including permanent and temporary staffing, technology, and strategic advisory support.

Headquartered in Salt Lake City with offices nationwide, CHG is consistently recognized as a top workplace for its culture of care, growth, and purpose. We are committed to making a difference in the lives of those we serve: healthcare organizations, clinicians, our employees, and communities alike.

Find out how at www.chghealthcare.com.