

Management skills for medical administrators



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Competence in management and administration is considered as extremely important and therefore essential for medical administrators. They coordinate the work of others to accomplish specific aims and objectives of the system in which they work. Therefore they have to undertake the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and coordinating various work activities. In order to accomplish those, they have to deploy and utilize a variety of essential resources in support of their organization's objectives, besides maintaining a balanced internal environment. In order to accomplish all of that effectively, they need to have the needed management competencies. Notable among these are: acquiring and maintaining contemporary professional knowledge and skills, use of flexibility, priori-

tization, maximization of use of personnel and material resources, effective communication, and acquisition and use of essential leadership capabilities. Above all, a medical administrator has to preserve and enhance the quality of care, under all circumstances. A medical administrator who is competent in communication, building teamwork, ensuring self-development as well as development of others can accomplish the objectives more effectively and efficiently.

Key words: Skills, competencies, management, administration, leadership

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Medical Administrators are extremely busy professionals. They undertake continuing professional development in areas that they deem important for their professional advancement. However, one area which is considered extremely essential pertains to management and administration.

Administration is defined as a cooperative group behavior, which is aimed at achieving a purpose through cooperative actions. Manage-

ment, on the other hand, is defined as getting things done through people. Therefore an administrator or a manager coordinates the work of others to accomplish aims and objectives of the system in which he works. In this regard, each administrator has to undertake the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, controlling, and coordinating various work activities.

Planning deals with setting goals and converting them into specific objectives. It therefore covers goals and objectives, new methods and procedures, budget, and continuing education programs. Planning includes in it operating schedules, quality specifications, timetables, and deadlines to be met. Finally, the planning process establishes policies, standard operating procedures, rules and regulations.

Organizing is the process of ensuring the availability of the needed resources. The resources include equipment, materials, space, human resource or workforce, position descriptions, location of equipment, workstations and storage areas.

Staffing is a function of putting 'flesh on the organizational structure'. By this time the work requirements have been specified and therefore the manager works out, in consultation with other concerned professionals, the

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number and type of employees needed to carry out the work.

Activating, which is also called directing, includes selection and indoctrination of new personnel, setting schedules, assignment to be given to various staff, training and coaching of the staff and resolution of employees grievances. An effective manager energizes the vital human resources by providing motivation, communication, and leadership.

Controlling: By this time the plans have been set in motion. However, the manager has to periodically evaluate how well the plans are working out. Therefore, he needs to measure results, compare them with what was expected and see if any significant differences exist. If they do, he has to find out the reason(s) for that. Having done that, the manager needs to take the necessary corrective action(s) to bring the results in line with the plan.

Coordinating involves cooperation with other sections of the department as well as cooperation with other departments.

The senior administrators or managers in an organization have to obtain, deploy, and utilize variety of essential resources in support of the organization's objectives. More importantly, they are to maintain an internal environment in the organization where the individuals work together in groups and perform efficiently and effectively towards the attainment of specific goals. Administrators and managers are expected to have the needed competencies for achieving the objectives effectively. The Science of Management provides specific skills, which if acquired properly can make a manager effective. Some of the important ones in this regard are:

- Acquiring and maintaining contemporary professional knowledge and skills;
- Ability to demonstrate initiative and flexibility;
- Ability to prioritize problems skillfully, effectively, efficiently and within permissible time;
- Maximizing the use of personnel and material resources;
- Ability to communicate effectively with superiors, and subordinates;
- Acquiring and using the needed leadership abilities.

While all of these skills are extremely important, the leadership abilities give the competitive edge to an individual who really wants to make a change in an organization for the better. An effective leader assesses the situation, coaches and counsels employees and guides their performance effectively. In doing so he maintains a high morale and therefore preserves enthusiasm and instills motivation among employees. A person cannot be considered an effective leader if he does not have the skills to select the most competent professionals and provide orientation and continuing education/continuous professional development to them. He identifies personnel problems and solves them effectively without giving an impression to the employees that he has done a favor to them. He always has an effective mechanism in place to address the grievances of staff. A successful leader always delegates the needed authority to complete or fulfill the responsibilities and empowers the subordinates optimally. He organizes, assigns work schedules skillfully and monitors the performance to meet the requisite standards. He is always able to accomplish assignments on time and to the satisfaction of superiors through a clear vision of meeting the standards rather than pleasing the superiors. Finally, he coordinates and cooperates with other work units.

An effective leader always follows scientific principles of management. In this regard he distributes the work in such a way that each person has a clearly assigned work to be done and has the needed resources to accomplish that. He delegates authority commensurate with responsibility. An effective leader always expects discipline and builds morale among the workforce. He always ensures unity of command, or that there is only one boss and no employee reports to more than one supervisor. Similarly, he ensures that there is unity of direction, or that every unit within the organization has only one 'master plan' or set of overriding objectives. One important trait of an effective manager is that he always keeps his personal interest second to that of the organization. He ensures that orders and instructions flow down from the higher manager to the lower manager and communication and complaints move up in the same channel. However, work information is en-

sured to flow sideways between departments. Finally, an effective manager ensures that all employees are treated equally and fairly and he does not favor one employee over another because that generates dissatisfaction and conflicts among employees. He encourages initiative among employees. It may be appreciated that the initiative is generally defined as the ability of an employee to do something correct which is needed in a given situation but without being told to do so. This results in the fuller capacity of employees being used for achievement of organizational objectives.

While the administrative principles, briefly discussed above, are extremely important for effective function in an organization, an effective manager or a leader also ensures that the needed facilities and equipment, materials and supplies, human resources, information, and other requirement for effective function of the organization are provided to all those who need. Through provision of the needed resources, and following the principle of scientific organizing, a leader or a manager ensures that the output or outcome is up to the expected standard and it is achieved with due regard to cost effectiveness.

A medical administrator has to preserve quality under all circumstances. Therefore a manager who is committed to cost effectiveness also ensures that time, which is an extremely valuable commodity, is not wasted. He therefore eliminates all those things, which need not be done in an organization. More importantly, he does not undertake any activity himself, which can be done effectively by someone else. A well-trained administrator ensures that he not only avoids the wastage of his time but also the time of other colleagues and subordinates. In order to ensure that resources in general, and time in particular, are not wasted, an effective manager always has a system of foresight, which facilitates doing the right thing at the right time effectively and efficiently. An effective leader shuns overstaffing and mal-organization and always guards against misinformation.

While there are so many other skills and competencies that medical administrators should have, we shall conclude by emphasizing the need for effective communication, building teamwork, and ensuring self-development as well as development of others.

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CME Questions

After you have completed reading the above article, take the test given below. Circle the appropriate choice (a, b, c or d) in the answer sheet (page 80) to show the correct answer to each MCQ. MCQs 21 to 30 are related to the content in this article.

21. An administrator achieves the objectives of his organization primarily by:
 - a. Giving directions how to work
 - b. Doing major part of the work himself
 - c. Coordinating the work of others
 - d. Ensuring the availability of financial resources
22. Administrators have to establish policies, standard operating procedures and the requisite rules. These are a part of the process of:
 - a. Planning
 - b. Organizing
 - c. Staffing
 - d. Directing
23. An effective administrator ensures that each employee has a job description. This pertains to one of the following management functions: Which one?
 - a. Planning
 - b. Organizing
 - c. Staffing
 - d. Controlling
24. An effective manager has to specify the work requirements of his work unit. This should ideally be accomplished:
 - a. During the staffing process
 - b. Before the staffing process
 - c. After the staffing process
 - d. When needed
25. Motivation, communication, and leadership are essential attributes of an effective management practice. These are used to:
 - a. Developing plans
 - b. Organizing the work
 - c. Selecting the needed personnel
 - d. Energizing the work force
26. Each well-trained administrator has to take some corrective action sometime. This should be done to ensure that the results or the outcomes are:
 - a. Efficient and effective
 - b. Used to take disciplinary action
 - c. As planned and expected
 - d. Used to reward good workers
27. Administrators and managers need specific competencies primarily to:
 - a. Plan the departments properly
 - b. Organize the activities effectively
 - c. Achieve the objectives effectively
 - d. Provide justifications for budget
28. An administrator who is committed to preserving high standards of performance, can do so only if he pays attention to some essentials. One of these is not an essential. Which one?
 - a. Maintaining high morale
 - b. Preserving enthusiasm
 - c. Providing motivation
 - d. Criticizing openly
29. An effective leader should aim to please the superiors or higher administrators through:
 - a. Meeting the standards
 - b. Awarding good workers
 - c. Punishing bad workers
 - d. Pleasing the superiors
30. A major source of dissatisfaction and conflict among employees in organizations is:
 - a. Some are more qualified than others
 - b. Some are paid more than others
 - c. A manager favors some over the others
 - d. None of the above