

# The doctor as an agent of change in healthcare organizations

## *O médico como agente de mudanças nas organizações de saúde*

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### ABSTRACT

The healthcare sector has undergone countless transformations. There is today, increasing demand of the population for changes capable of rescuing the quality of service offered and the financial return expected. Healthcare companies go through economic, financial, and operational difficulties, the fruit of a difficult scenario. A more active participation in administrative management has been increasingly required of health professionals, particularly doctors. This participation is demanded on different aspects but aiming for an integrated vision of the whole system and more engagement in the interconnection between the various parties involved in the processes of health care. The strategic role played by the doctor today can be analyzed from two angles: as a problem and a solution. The understanding of the complexities of this relationship as well the identification of the clinical, operational, and strategic interfaces is a major challenge.

**Key words:** Health Management; Medical Education; Hospital Administration.

### RESUMO

*O setor de saúde tem sofrido inúmeras transformações. Há hoje crescente demanda da população por mudanças capazes de resgatar a qualidade do serviço ofertado e o retorno financeiro esperado. Empresas de saúde passam por dificuldades econômicas, financeiras e operacionais, frutos de um difícil cenário. Têm sido cada vez mais exigido dos profissionais de saúde, particularmente do médico, participação mais ativa na gestão administrativa, sob os mais diferentes aspectos, visão integrada de todo o sistema e mais engajamento na interligação entre as diversas partes envolvidas nos processos de cuidado à saúde. O papel estratégico hoje exercido pelo médico pode ser analisado sob dois ângulos: tanto como um problema quanto como uma solução. Entender a complexidade dessa relação, bem como identificar as interfaces clínicas, operacionais e estratégicas, é um grande desafio.*

*Palavras-chave:* Gestão em Saúde; Educação Médica; Administração Hospitalar.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the healthcare sector has undergone countless transformations. Currently, there is an increasing demand, both from managers and service providers and much of the population for changes capable of rescuing the quality of service offered and financial return expected. Health plans and hospitals go through economic, financial, and operational difficulties, fruits of a difficult scenario characterized by the progressive increase in health care costs stemming from technological innovation and increased complexity of therapeutic procedures for propaedeutics

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and health prevention. In addition, there are strong pressures for price reductions resulting from an increasingly competitive market that seeks resources optimization. Finally, the sector is constantly influenced by political situations and judicial decisions with major strategic impacts on businesses.

Thus, a more active participation in administrative management, under different aspects, and an integrated vision of the whole system and more engagement in the interconnection between the various parties involved in the processes of health care have been increasingly required of health professionals, particularly physicians.

For a long time, there was an almost insurmountable barrier between doctors and hospital administrations. Conversely, hospital administrations saw doctors as uncommitted collaborators, misaligned with operational processes, little concerned about the company's financial results, and intended only in the completion of their personal interests; meanwhile, doctors blamed hospital administrations for most problems of continuing fall of incomes and working conditions.

Doctors have crucial importance within the framework of management in healthcare companies. Their strategic role can presently be analyzed from two angles: as a problem and a solution. To understand the complexities of this relationship as well as to identify the clinical, operational, and strategic interfaces is a major challenge. There are certainly some barriers that hinder the greater participation of doctors as a factor of change in healthcare organizations:

- **academic training barriers** – the curriculum of courses in Medicine does not teach the fundamentals of management in health such as quality control, processes, people, finances, or strategic planning;
- **cultural barriers** – the doctors' education is set in an environment of competition, which favors the formation of individualistic and egocentric professionals. At the same time, doctors are usually resistant to changes remaining loyal to past paradigms. Finally, in general, there is difficulty in time organization and management;

- **operational barriers** – one of the main aspects is related to the participation of doctors in operational processes. Firstly, many doctors find it difficult to work as a team, accept criticism and external interventions, and delegate powers. Moreover, they are averse to standards, protocols, pre-set indicators, form filling, and completion of steps. These aspects keep them away from a broad and complete vision of the entire system, even maintaining an uncompromising stand towards operational and financial results. Another aspect refers to the sharp resistance to accepting monitoring of their practices and results.

It is observed that most of the obstacles are of cultural and technical training origin. Therefore, for doctors to become the solution and effective agents of change in healthcare organizations it is critical to initially go through transformations on professional training with the advent of teaching basic administration knowledge from graduation courses to the everyday practice. The decision, already commonly well exercised under the clinical context, becomes relevant and also demanded within the strategic and management context. The change in posture is vital, becoming more collaborative and cooperative, focused on teamwork, and with commitment towards results by assuming a real leading role. The responsible involvement in operational processes is another primordial aspect, not only from the clinical point of view, but mainly administrative.

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