Think Like a Project Manager to Succeed in Medicine

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Working within healthcare presents many challenges and as a physician, your role extends beyond an understanding of medicine to encompass a wider scope of personal and business functionalities.

Being a physician means being a team leader that works with a wide range of individuals on multiple teams. This includes your innermost medical team such as assistants and residents, as well as an extended outer team including administrators, vendors, societies, etc. You are inherently leading, defining, delegating, and setting expectations every day. This is seen at all levels of medicine from residents managing students, attendings managing residents, physicians managing their care teams, physicians being in administrator roles and more. Managing is central to every role a physician takes and its importance must not be overlooked.

In addition to the type of teams you work with, the scale of projects that physicians manage ranges in size and importance. This can include developing an article with multiple authors, coordinating a conference with multiple speakers, or implementing a new system in your clinic. Additional clinical examples include implementing a new procedural or medication protocol in your office or conforming to a new legislative statute.

Are you asking a team to perform a complex task, and are you essentially managing this team and the outcome? If the answers to both is yes, then you're in the right place. The definition of a *project manager* is "the person in overall charge of the planning and execution of a particular project." [1] The noun *project* is defined as "an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim." [1]

In layman terms, a project is a task with a particular outcome you would like to achieve. As the physician, you are the team leader and are often directly or indirectly, consciously or subconsciously, functioning as a project manager.

Please hear me out, I am not saying you should do your clinic manager's or administrator's job and am not downplaying the complex training it takes to become a formal project manager. There are often outside people to whom you should entrust certain tasks, but you may also be entrusted with a society project or need to complete a large project outside of anyone else's scope or responsibilities. By looking at these projects from a project manager's perspective, you will be able to accomplish your goals and be successful.

According to Harvard Business Review 20 minute Manager- Managing Projects, a project contains four phases: planning, build up, implementation, closeout. [2]
1. **Planning**
   a. This is foundation of your project and if not done correctly, your project is more likely to fail.
   b. What is the problem you're trying to address? Now dig deeper and identify any problem(s) contributing to the problem or any roadblocks you may face.
   c. What is/are your goals? They should be specific, attainable, objective, and with a clear time frame. Dictate how to measure the goal and its quality.

    d. Who does this affect, who holds stake in this issue and solution, and who should you recruit? The people you engage should be readily accessible, communication should be established, and they should be capable.

    e. Clearly identify each task. Large tasks are made of smaller tasks, these need to be identified and relayed clearly. Use the sum of tasks to create a time estimate.

    f. Identify your risks

    g. Know the scope of the project is dependent on schedule and budget.

2. **Build Up**

    a. Establish you team and their skill sets. Each team member should have clear objectives of the overall vision and goal as well as their specific individual goals and expectations. They should know what skills they are lending to the project or what skills you will need them to establish. Have an initial meeting to review the structure, commitments, address limitations, supply feedback, etc.

    b. Schedule. Set dates on key large tasks and the overall project. Clarify the dates that are flexible and ones that are rigid. Identify critical tasks that need to be completed so other tasks can be performed. It helps to identify when those tasks need to be started and completed. Although Project Managers have actual programs and systems they use to schedule, for our scope it simply helps to be aware that scheduling is pertinent.

    c. Budget. What will the cost entail? Think of wages, supplies, equipment, skills, overhead, space, etc. If there is no financial component, what is your time budget?

3. **Implementation**

    a. Delegate. To administrators, staff, outside businesses, vendors, etc.

    b. Know the updates in a timely manner

    c. Track results against key tasks, identified goals, budget and schedule

    d. Troubleshoot uncontrollable external curveballs, delays, budget issues, deviations from the original tasks/goals, people or interpersonal issues. Resolve risks that are identified.

    e. Communicate progress. To the team members, administrators, or to those who are impacted by the project outcome

4. **Closeout**

    a. Does the complete project need a handoff? Who will the finished handoff be given to for future care? For example, a new scheduling or aesthetic protocol would need to be executed by a clinic manager or other person.

    b. Thoroughly evaluate the project, the shortcomings and successes, and how you or your team can learn.

    c. Thank your team.

Sources:

1. Project, project manager. Lexico Dictionary: https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/project and https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/project_manager (accessed 6/18/2020)

2. Harvard Business Review. 20 Minute Manager: Managing Projects. ©2014 Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.