

7 Ways to Mitigate & Resolve Turf Battles in Healthcare Organizations



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A. Introduction

One of the major challenges faced by Medical Staff leaders on a regular basis is addressing and resolving turf battles. The definition of “Turf war” according to google is “an acrimonious dispute between rival groups over territory or a particular sphere of influence”. Turf battles among specialties emerged and became a prominent topic of discussion among healthcare professionals in recent years due to the technology boom we have experienced and also the recent innovations and advancements in medicine. In addition, the current trend of physicians to utilize new technology in ways that have not been used before have risen to these tense situations.

This has caused the previously demarcated scopes of practice and defined turfs for specialties or sub-specialties to become blurred and as a result physicians have rallied against these advancements or changes by trying to defend their turf as they call it. Those who originally had exclusive rights to a particular procedure or specialty no longer could hold on to this right as other specialties encroach into their domain so they find ways and methods to exclude or argue against them performing these procedures or providing the service.

This is an example of how specialty boards are offering certification in the same sub-specialties but of course

from its own perspective. As you can see in the graph among the 9 sub-specialties listed there are no sub-specialties involving less than 2 boards.

Turf battles generally cause tense situations which may have several negative ramifications on the smooth functioning of the Medical Staff as body and the quality of patient care that is rendered by it through the healthcare organization. They are:

1. Lack of coordination or collaboration between physicians
2. Decrease in the quality of care provided to patients
3. Loss or revenue for physicians
4. Loss of revenue and strategic expansions in healthcare organizations
5. May negatively affect recruitment decisions
6. Loss of trust between Medical Staff and the Health care organization
7. Rivalry among specialties or Medical Staff who are competing for the procedures or services which leads to the Silo effect.
8. Disruptive behavior

There are several strategies to ameliorate or avoid turf battles in healthcare organizations:

1. Avoid turf battles

When situations get tense between healthcare professionals, hospital leadership should distance them until things cool down. After emotions have subsided, meetings can be arranged to discuss these issues in an objective and calm manner. If patient care is jeopardized as a result of these situations, then and only then should leadership intervene to protect patients and ensure that high quality care is provided to their patients.

2. Establish Core/Non-Core privileging system

Another way to avoid these conflicts is to establish a criteria-based core/non-core privileging system which would define the education and training required for every specialty, sub-specialty or special procedure as well as the level of competency that would be required for initial granting of these privileges and for privileging. Once threshold criteria is in place and the procedure list defined for every specialty/sub-specialty, this will set the competency expectations and there will be no basis for discussions related to whether one specialty or Medical Staff is more competent to perform a particular procedure or service. The threshold criteria will determine that.

3. Establish a system to introduce new technology or service

Defining a system for introducing new technology or service into the healthcare organization will help reduce turf battles by formalizing a process that is consistent and streamlined over the whole healthcare organization. It is important also to involve all stake holders who may utilize or the same equipment or provide a similar service when developing this process.

This process will help expose at an early stage any objections or concerns from the part of other specialties when a new specialty is going to provide similar services. It will help the organization address these concerns early on and this will help avoid major conflicts and clarify misunderstandings.

4. Create centers of excellence or service lines

Creating centers of excellence for disease groups such as Vascular Medicine, pain medicine, cancer, bariatric surgery etc. encourages Medical Staff from similar

specialties or sub-specialties to work together as a collaborative team for providing excellent patient care. In the case of Vascular Medicine, the specialties that will work together are cardiologists, interventional cardiologists, cardiothoracic surgeons and vascular surgeons. Each specialty has its own approach to treating a condition and through this program, these physicians can discuss the patient’s condition and come to an agreement on the best way to treat him/her. These discussions and collaborations provide a venue for physicians to work with each other and not against each other and will help avoid turf battles. This will help also to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction with the care provided.

This practice can be very useful for procedures that are low volume and can help physicians collaborate on care of patients or even perform procedures to keep up their competency and clinical knowledge. This will in turn help them meet the credentialing criteria and volume requirements set for certain specialties or procedures.

5. Ownership of a service, unit, technology, equipment does not belong to a single department.

There is a misconception in departmentalized Medical Staff that certain units, technology, a service or equipment belong to that department or specialty. An illustrative example of these practices is evident in specialties from other departments who are involved in care of pediatric patients. It has been a known practice that Pediatric Surgeons, Pediatric Psychologists, Pediatric urologists, pediatric cardiothoracic surgeons request additional privileges in the department of Pediatrics to be able to admit pediatric patients on the pediatric ward.

However, this practice is outdated and dates back to when every department was responsible for the space and services it used to provide. Nowadays, all services, units, equipment and beds are the property and responsibility of the Healthcare organization and do not fall under the jurisdiction of a single department. Some examples of units and equipment used by several departments are Endoscopy unit (used by gastroenterologists, pulmonologists, General Surgeons), Sleep lab (used by Neurologists, Pulmonologists and psychiatrists) etc. So these Medical Staff, from different departments, are granted privileges to use these units such as the endoscopy unit and sleep lab which are now considered common areas and do not belong to one department. This change in conceptions and beliefs can reduce or avoid turf battles.

6. Set standards of behavior through a code of conduct

Establishing a code of conduct and making sure that Medical Staff abide by it will ensure that heated discussions, confrontations and unprofessional conducts are avoided. When professional standards of behavior are defined and clear to Medical Staff, then they can be held accountable when they exhibit unprofessional behavior which may be related to turf battles.

7. Involving specialties who provide similar services or procedures in educational activities and teaching

Medical Staff who provide similar services or perform similar procedures will benefit from presenting their cases for review and discussion in educational conferences in the related specialties or sub-specialties. These conferences

will help Medical Staff learn from each other to improve the standards of care provided to patients. These sessions should be conducted for educational purposes and not to criticize or degrade individuals. In addition, these Medical Staff should be involved in teaching residents and students and providing coverage for the service as a whole. This will help reduce the concern of competing physicians that the concerned Medical Staff will attract patients to their practice and they will lose these patients and consequently their revenue.

Turf battles have existed in the past and will continue to exist in the future with the continuous advancements we see in medicine and technology. The key here is to acknowledge them and accept them as part of everyday reality and to take steps to avoid them or ameliorate their effects. This will facilitate Medical Staff to be collegial and collaborative with each other and will return their focus on providing excellent patient care instead of them worrying about a potential threat to their livelihood.

Press Release

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Campaign at LAU Medical Center Rizk Hospital

It is true that Colorectal cancer is the 2nd most common killer cancer among men and women, yet it is highly preventable by early detection starting at the age of 45.

During the month of March, LAU Medical Center - Rizk Hospital raised awareness on this type of cancer through different activities that encouraged people to take the FIT test. This year, our medical center took part and sponsored the Walkathon, a family-friendly walk initiated by SAID (Spread Awareness Increase (early) Detection) NGO, in collaboration with Rabab Cancer Foundation and under the auspices of Beirut Marathon Association. This 5 KM walk event took place on Sunday March 10, 2019, from Ain el Mreysheh to the Military Club and aimed at honoring colorectal cancer patients in addition to raising awareness on screening and early detection.

Another significant activity is the Colon Cancer Awareness Activation that took place on the 19th of March, 2019 at LAU Medical Center- Rizk Hospital; Free FIT kits were



distributed among participants as a preliminary screening test for colon cancer. Also, visitors with a positive FIT results, will be offered an OPD rate for their colonoscopy.

Getting regular screening tests for colon cancer is the single best way to protect yourself from the disease. It can catch cancer early, when it's most treatable, and help prevent the disease by finding abnormal growths called polyps that can turn into cancer at a later stage.



La santé est chère n'atendons pas de la perdre,
pour l'apprecier...

Avec la mutuelle ALRIAYA la santé reste précieuse
mais devient moins chère

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