

Developing Physician Leaders One Cohort at a time: Cone Health Physician Leadership Academy



In a [Chicago Medicine](#) article on Developing Physician Leaders, Susan Reynolds, MD, PhD, President and CEO of The Institute for Medical Leadership¹ informs readers that *“It takes time, money, and a great deal of planning to build a successful future leaders’ program. However, if done right, the organization will receive a significant return on its investment, and the efforts of the future leaders will benefit the organization for many years to come.”* Cone Health in Greensboro, North Carolina has figured out how to make this work with their Physician Leadership Academy (PLA).

During a recent action group webinar of the NC Hospital Association High-Performance Health System Collaborative (HPHS), Amy Martinez, Director of Organizational Effectiveness at Cone Health, shared the inception and progressive growth of its **Physician Leadership Academy** which will graduate its 5th cohort in November of this year. The PLA, and other intentional efforts for executive and administrative staffs’ leadership development, stemmed from Cone Health’s dedication to strategically nurture a system-wide culture that supports patient-centered care.

Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard efforts, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile – Vince Lombardi

The Cone team lead by Ms. Martinez offers performance consulting, executive coaching and leadership development. The team’s goal is to help staff by coaching toward performance goal attainment, addressing team dysfunction, or helping leaders with issues that involve team morale and engagement issues that may exist among a team. For physician leadership development, the team realized that many of their physicians had not been exposed to leadership development classes in medical school. As a solution to help physicians, in collaboration with the Center for Creative Leadership, the PLA was designed with the intent of helping physicians focus on self-awareness and to learn their personal strengths through deliberate actions and coaching that support them becoming stronger leaders.

Each year-long cohort of diverse physicians from Cone Health and its surrounding communities completes a battery of psychological assessments and receives one-on-one coaching in addition to completing team-based action learning projects. Face-to-face content sessions complement the learning and include topics such as strategic leadership, unconscious bias, polarity thinking, boundary spanning and female physicians as strategic partners.

Organizations may gain the greatest organizational impact when high performers increase their competency even if the changes are small. (Hoole, Steed, Gentry, AMO Annual conference, 2007)

Dr. James (Jim) C. Osborne, a practicing internist and leader in ACO development within the Cone Health service area, was a past participant of the PLA. During the webinar, he shared how the PLA program has positively impacted him and his behaviors as a leader among his peers and within the community. His communication skills with others has become more acute and he reports feeling more confident in his abilities to work within the teams he often finds himself involved in, as his practice has evolved from what it was at its inception.

It has been said many times over that it is hard to engage physicians in work beyond providing direct care to patients. Patient record documentation, continuing education requirements, required special committee meetings and inadequate leadership training are just a few things that often get in the way of physicians engaging in self-development work. The highly sought after PLA program at Cone Health is proof that if you build it with them in mind, they will come; and that despite the challenges they face daily to “get all the work accomplished,” if you design something meaningful that is tailored to their needs, it is possible to get physicians engaged in leadership work.

To learn more [request a link](#) to hear the presentation or contact [Ms. Martinez](#).