

7

Critical Competencies
Account Managers
Need to Succeed



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844.790.3021 | solutions@CMRinstitute.org | CMRinstitute.org

The evolving healthcare environment requires a new kind of account manager with deeper industry knowledge and a more sophisticated set of skills.

To ensure that sales teams are adequately equipped for the challenges ahead, ACO and industry thought leaders recommend that account managers possess these seven critical competencies.



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“Physician time will be a constrained resource in the ACO era,” says Anthony Slonim, MD, DrPH, CPE, FACPE, President and Chief Executive Officer, Renown Health. He is also Chairman of CMR Institute’s Board of Directors. “Physicians will need to decide how to distribute their time among various obligations, such as new administrative roles, quality improvement initiatives, and other responsibilities.”

With access at a premium, account managers should avoid traditional sales pitches and find more valuable ways to serve the practice, ACO, or hospital. “My recommendation is to be the expert,” says Jeffrey Farber, MD, MBA, CPE, Chief Executive Officer of Mount Sinai Care. Dr. Farber is also the Chief Medical Officer and Senior Vice-President for Population Health, Mount Sinai Health System. “Physicians are overwhelmed by the fast-paced changes in the healthcare market. Account managers can play a valuable role by helping educate physicians so they can better navigate these choppy waters.”



For the first time, many providers are being rewarded for delivering better care at a lower cost. Hospitals like Montefiore Medical Center are moving from a transaction-oriented business to one that relies on value-based sources of revenue, says Henry Chung, MD, Vice-President and Chief Medical Officer, Montefiore Care Management. In 2013, Montefiore derived approximately one half of its annual operating revenue from value-based payment arrangements, such as full risk contracts, shared savings, and Medicaid medical home payments.

“That tells you we are at the tipping point,” Chung says. “Two years ago, we were providing care management services only for patients in our value-based arrangements. That is increasingly no longer the case. We can’t tell doctors to treat one patient one way because they are in a value-based arrangement and not offer the same services to other patients.”

Account managers should recognize how these new payment models are shifting providers’ priorities. For example, ACOs are increasingly concerned about better coordination of care to help reduce unnecessary hospitalizations, utilization of expensive tests, and complications of chronic diseases.



ACOs and other providers must measure and report on a variety of quality and safety indicators to meet regulatory requirements and remain competitive. And with more direct financial incentives to reduce costs and improve the quality of care, providers are becoming even more interested in measuring performance.

Account managers need to be fluent in a range of outcomes, including clinical, financial, and quality of life data, when speaking to clinicians in an ACO, integrated delivery network, or large medical group. They need to be comfortable discussing pharmacoeconomic data, as well as medication adherence and appropriate utilization data.

Healthcare reform is focused on providing value and attaining better outcomes for a lower cost for larger populations. Because of these changes, providers will be exploring ways to reduce inappropriate use of therapies and encourage proper utilization and adherence to medications. Therefore, it will be critical for account managers to have value-based discussions with providers—including the direct and indirect costs of their medications and the alternatives, as well as the ideal patient profile to target for maximum outcomes.



Taking a consultative approach with customers can help account managers earn credibility and trust as access becomes even tighter in the years ahead.

“Account managers must be able to shift their mindset from delivering a product to helping the customer address a business or organizational issue,” says Randolph Legg, Zone Vice President, Sales, Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals.

By viewing customers as businesses, account managers can work toward shared goals with provider organizations. But before they can identify opportunities for partnership, they must understand their customers’ new pain points. For example, many medical groups and hospitals are struggling to implement IT platforms to manage the data that is required for monitoring and reporting performance in a value-based environment. Other providers are struggling to implement standardized protocols and interventions across fragmented organizations. By understanding these issues, account managers may be able to offer an appropriate solution, whether it is a new technology, program, or other service.



“The account manager of the future must develop strategies and actions that are integral to achieving aligned results with the customer,” Legg says. Specifically, account managers should possess a strategic focus that enables them to have a long-term vision of the customer relationship.

For example, an account manager might work with a medical group on a strategy to improve care plan adherence in an at-risk population. Or an account manager might provide an educational tool or technology to help an ACO improve a key quality measure, such as reduced readmissions for recently hospitalized patients.



Today, physician practices, health systems, and ACOs are increasingly concerned about what happens to patients outside the office or hospital setting. Many are using technology to monitor patients' health at home, while others are bringing back house calls to help at-risk patients avoid costly complications of their condition. The reason for this shift is providers' new focus on managing the health of populations, including those at-risk for inappropriate utilization of healthcare services.

In this environment, account managers should understand how their products and services might help address the overall health of certain patient populations, such as those with heart failure, diabetes, or respiratory diseases.

In an ACO environment, "the incentives are realigned, and if you can help keep a patient out of the office or hospital, that is good for the bottom line," says Drew Harris, DPM, MPH, Assistant Professor and Program Director for Health Policy, Thomas Jefferson University School of Population Health.



As the healthcare industry undergoes significant transformation, account managers may be overwhelmed by what they need to learn just to stay current. Some may have to adapt to reorganizations at their companies. To be successful in this environment, account managers will need to be flexible and focused.

Account managers also need to take ownership of their personal development. They should possess a passion for lifelong learning and work with their supervisor to develop a professional development plan that gives them the confidence to meet the challenges ahead.

All seven critical competencies hinge on an account manager's desire to deliver value to his or her customer, says Slonim of Renown Health.

"Look at the measures that ACOs are concerned with and try to align them with what your company offers," he says. "But don't stop there. Talk to ACO executives to get an understanding of their priorities. This will help you have a meaningful conversation about ways that you can add value."



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