

The 10 Essential Steps to Effectively Engaging Physicians

1. Set a tone of collaboration – Make the time convenient for the practitioner, go to his/her practice/ bring food, know something that the physician excels at or is proud of. Open the conversation with, “I appreciate your visiting with us today. I’ve heard you trained at UCLA, did you know Dennis Cope?” Or “I see you have original photographs in your office. They are great. Who is the photographer?”
2. Explain the purpose of the project. “Our IPA has decided to focus some attention on the variation we see in patient’s use of emergency department services. It’s important because it has a big impact on patient’s care but also because it is an important contributor to our financial performance. My visit here today is part of that effort”.
3. Be non-judgmental, allowing the practitioner to become part of the solution. “As we have explored how patients use ED services, we noted that patients of some physicians seem to use the ED more than others. We are very interested in understanding why that happens. I’m hoping you can contribute to that understanding.”
4. Present ONLY enough data to inform the discussion and explain why you are talking to him or her. “I’d like to show you this chart. It shows the variation we see in the frequency with which patients of different doctors use ED services. You are this point on the chart. Can you tell me a bit about how your practice uses the ED?” “Why do you think the rate is different from others in your community?”
5. Listen carefully to his or her responses. Demonstrate you want to understand without judging. “So, it sounds like from your point of view opening the practice at night has safety issues? Can you tell me more about what has happened?” or “I can understand how difficult recruiting physicians can be and opening at night is what young physicians are interested in. What do you think others have done?”
6. Engage other staff that might be present. “What do you folks hear from patients as you work with them?”
7. Offer praise whenever possible. “It seems like you are really trying to get folks in whenever possible. That’s great because our patient feedback says they would rather come to the office than have to travel to the ED.”
8. Encourage staff to consider solutions to problems identified so the physician won’t have to be the solution to each problem. “Can you folks think of ways to respond to patient’s needs before the doctor is involved? Have you talked to staff in other practices?”
9. Conclude by asking if the provider rep that has joined you can follow up on any questions emerging from the visit or provide additional information.
10. Send a follow up thank you note summarizing the results of the meeting and re-emphasizing that the IPA is really interested in reducing the frequency of ED visits, especially for symptoms that can be managed in the office.