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Building Business Know-How Through Simulation

Hands-on tools can optimize financial learning among nonfinancial staff.

At Catholic Healthcare Partners (CHP), we ascertained that a portion of our staff needed to develop a new skill set in an area in which they were not as comfortable and had less than a passionate interest. Furthermore, we believed a hands-on game that engaged them competitively in learning by doing would have a better outcome than a traditional classroom-type seminar. Therefore, CHP incorporated a business simulation game into its professional development program for nonfinancial managers.

The simulation activity is part of a much broader professional development commitment known as CHP University, which consists of a full spectrum of training opportunities and ranges from formal leadership programs for executive staff to online courses available to all employees.

During the past year and a half, the simulation tool has sent more than 175 of CHP's clinical managers down the path toward improved business acumen and financial literacy.

These managers may not emerge from the daylong activity ready to take the helm as CEOs, but the majority of them leave with a more concrete appreciation of their operation's

impact on our organization's overall viability as well as a plan to put their new skills to work.

CHP is trying to narrow the chasm between clinical expertise and business intelligence by targeting individuals with clinical-line responsibilities whose backgrounds lack financial experience.

Many clinical people spend their days interacting with patients, so some may not fully understand the connection between their actions and the financial health of the organization. Similarly, some clinical leaders have risen through the ranks because they are superb clinicians, not because they are seasoned business managers. As leaders, these individuals are then expected to shoulder responsibility for financial matters without the benefit of a business background.

The business simulation tool that we use (Zodiak by Paradigm Learning, Tampa, Fla.) provides an efficient template for addressing this skill and knowledge gap.

The game condenses an impressive level of content, teamwork, discussion and hands-on activity into a single morning to help managers

begin to connect the dots between the intricacies of delivering quality patient care and the complexities of remaining financially viable within the healthcare arena.

CHP is far from being alone in this regard, but I would argue that the need within systems like ours to develop financial literacy among clinical managers in nursing, physical therapy, pharmacy and other disciplines may be especially acute.

By concentrating an appreciable amount of learning in a short time frame, the simulation cultivates an awareness of and a buy in to business realities among a large number of leaders with relatively little financial expertise.

Using an inverted pyramid approach to draw participants into the world of business ownership, the day's training begins by removing participants from the realities of their specific responsibilities, the organization as a whole and the healthcare profession in general.

Divided into a few small teams of three or four players, participants purchase a simulated company, Zodiak, and run it for three years in simulated time. This is about four-and-a-half hours in actuality. Each group competes against one another for the best outcome, strategizing as a group, making business decisions and producing a

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